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T. FISHER UNWIN. LONDON.

ARUNDEL

BY

E. F. BENSON

AUTHOR OF "DODO," "MRS. AMES," ETC.

"And for those who follow the gleam there is always light sufficient to show them their way. . . ."

T. FISHER UNWIN

1 ADELPHI TERRACE

LONDON

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PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

THE CALL FROM WITHOUT

COLONEL FANSHAWE was riding slowly back to his bungalow about an hour before the sunset of a hot and brilliant day in the middle of March. He had spent a long day in the saddle, for the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Forces was at Peshawar on a visit of inspection, and he had reviewed and inspected and inspected and reviewed and given medals and colours and compliments and criticism till the whole garrison, who had been under arms on the parade ground since an early hour that morning, was ready to drop with a well-earned fatigue. That evening there was to be a great dinner-party followed by a dance at the house of the Resident. To-morrow the Commander-in-Chief was to go up the Khyber pass, returning just in time to catch the night train to Lahore, arriving there at daybreak, and prepared to spend another day similar to this. And yet, so reflected Colonel Fanshawe, he was made, to all appearance, of flesh and blood, exactly like anybody else: indeed, he was endowed with flesh to a somewhat phenomenal extent; for, though not of unusual height, he swung a full eighteen stone into his saddle, ate and drank in perfectly amazing quanti-

ties, and, without doubt, would to-night prance genially and colossally from beginning to end of every dance with a succession of the prettiest girls in Peshawar. It was equally certain that at the conclusion he would go in person to the bandmaster and beg as a personal favour for an extra or two. . . . And Colonel Fanshawe, lean and slight and in excellent condition, felt himself a pigmy and an invalid in contrast with this indefatigable elephant who all day had seemed only to wax in energy and boisterousness and monumental briskness. It was as if some huge Government building had burst into active life: John Bull himself, as in the pages of some patriotic print, had become incarnate, commanding and guffawing and perspiring.

But the day, though fatiguing to everybody else except the Commander-in-Chief, had been highly satisfactory. Twice had he complimented Colonel Fanshawe on the smartness of his Pathan regiment, and since the regiment was one of the two institutions for which the Colonel lived and loved, it followed that in retrospect his habitual content, which at all times was of a very sterling quality, had been lifted to the levels of the sublime. And anticipation was up to the level of retrospect, for the second of these institutions which engaged all his energies and affection was the home towards which he was now ambling along the dusty roads. In the imperturbable fashion of a man who was not gifted with much imagination, he enjoyed what he had to the almost complete exclusion of desiring that which he had not; and though, if a genuine wishing-cap had been put ready to his hand, he would certainly have had a request or two to make,

he never, in the absence of that apocryphal piece of headgear, let his mind dwell on what it might have brought him. His wife, the second of that name, and Elizabeth, the daughter of the first, almost completely exiled from his mind all desires connected with his home, and were sufficient to satisfy the emotional needs of a love which was not the less luminous because it lacked the iridescence of romance. It burned with a steady and unwinking flame, without rockets and multi-coloured stars, and was eminently suited to light a man's way, so that he should go without stumbling through the dusk of a hazardous world. For the sake of his wife or of Elizabeth he would have given his life unquestioningly and with cheerfulness, regretting the necessity should such arise, but he would have done so without any of the ecstasy of self-sacrifice that inspired the hymns and the beatitudes on the lips of martyrs. In this sunny afternoon of middle age which had come to him there were none of the surprising flames that glorify the hour of dawn.

The road from the parade ground through cantonments lay level and dusty ; carob-trees, dense and varnished of foliage, with the long scimitar-shaped seed-pods of last year still clinging to them, met and mingled their branches together overhead, giving a vault of shadow from a midday sun, but now as the day drew near to its close, the level rays poured dazzling between the tree-trunks, turning the dust-ridden air into a mist of dusky gold. In front, seen through the arching trees, the huddled native town rose dim and amorphous through the haze, and the acres of flowering fruit-trees were a flush of pink and white petals. Southwards, level and infinite as the sea,

the Indian plain stretched to the farthest horizons, to the north rose the hills shoulder over shoulder till they culminated in fleecy clouds, among which, scarcely distinguishable, there glistened the immemorial whiteness of the eternal snows. Here, down in the plain, the very existence of those frozen cliffs seemed incredible, for, though there were still a dozen days of March to run, it seemed as if the powers of the air, in whose control is the great oven of India, had drawn the damper, so to speak, out of that cosmic furnace during the last week, to see if the heating apparatus was all in order for the approaching hot season, and Colonel Fanshawe's decision, against which there had been the growlings of domestic mutiny, that Elizabeth should start for England the next week, crystallized itself into the inexorable. He had gone so far in the freshness of the morning hours to-day as to promise her to reconsider his decision, but he determined now to telegraph for her passage as soon as he got home.

He quickened his pace a little as he approached his gate, at the lure of the refreshing hours that he had promised himself in his garden before it was necessary to dress for the dinner and the ball. The hot weather had already scorched to a cinder the herbs and grasses of unwatered places, but no such tragedy had yet overtaken this acre of green coolness, with its ditches and channels of unlimited irrigation, where the unusual heat had but caused the expansion, in a burst of premature luxuriance, of all the flowers that should have decorated April. So brilliant was this galaxy, that Colonel Fanshawe could hardly regret it, though it meant that even now the days of the garden

were numbered, and that through April it would sleep unblossoming, till the rains of May stirred it into that brief and delirious frenzy of flowering again that lasts but for a day or two, in some sultry intermission of the streaming skies that so soon open their flood-gates again, and cover the steaming earth with disjected petals. But at present, though April would pay the price in barrenness and withered leaf, summer and spring were in flower together, and tulips and petunias, marigolds and flame-flower, morning-glory and bougainvillæa made a jubilance of many-coloured carpet, while, more precious than all to the Colonel's soul, his rose hedges of crimson ramblers, Gloire de Dijon, and the briars of Peshawar flared with innumerable fragrance. A few days before, reluctantly, and with some inkling of the sentiments of a murderer who plans a crime, he had abandoned, marooned, so to speak, his tennis-court to die of drought, but the motive of his deed really gave a verdict of nothing more bloodthirsty than justifiable grassicide, for the well had given unmistakable signs that it was not capable of keeping the whole garden alive. Besides—and here for a moment his content was clouded again—Elizabeth was starting for England next week, and the tennis-court became an investment that paid no dividends in pleasure. His wife never played ; she would as soon have thought of coming downstairs to breakfast, and certainly she never did that. She preferred dancing all night.

He gave his horse into the charge of his orderly at the gate, and, a little stiff and bow-legged from so many hours in the saddle, walked up the short drive that lay between the abandoned

tennis-court and the rose-garden which was in full effervescence of flower and fragrance. Between him and his garden there was a relation as intimate almost and as comprehending as that between two personalities, and had some one with the gift of vivid yet easily intelligible eloquence presented his feeling towards it, as towards some beautiful dumb creature with a living identity of its own, the Colonel, though it had never struck him in that light before, would have acknowledged the truth of the imagery. Just now this silent sweet-smelling creature had begun to make a stir again after the hot windlessness of the day, for the breeze of sunset, invigorating as wine, had just sprung up, and wafted the evidence of its fragrant life in sheets and webs of perfume through the sibilant air, while as evidence of Elizabeth there came through the open windows of the drawing-room as complicated a *mêlée* of sound from the grand piano. Devoted and affectionate as father and daughter were to each other, Colonel Fanshawe felt slightly shy of Elizabeth when she was at the piano, for Elizabeth playing was Elizabeth transformed. A sort of fury of passion and intentness possessed her ; she evoked from the strings a personality as real to herself as was his garden to the Colonel, and all this intensity, as her bewildered father occasionally said to himself, was born from the compositions of "some German Johnny." In that rapt adoration of melody Elizabeth's mother lived again, just as she seemed to glow again from within Elizabeth's flushed face and sparkling eyes as she played. So, refraining from interrupting his daughter in her ecstatic communings with the par-

ticular German Johnny who engaged her attention at the moment, the Colonel stepped softly round the corner, and ordered himself a cup of tea in his bedroom, with which he refreshed himself as he adopted a garden-garb for his hot and close-fitting uniform. His wife, as he well knew, would be resting in her sitting-room in anticipation of the fatigue of the dinner and dance which were to close the day. Had there been no dance or dinner in prospect, she would be doing the same thing in repair of previous fatigue. She was one of those women who are capable of exertion as long as that over which they exert themselves furnishes them with amusement ; an hour's uncongenial occupation tired her completely out. But she was able to do anything she wanted to, and such a performance under such circumstances seemed but to invigorate her. Her husband rejoiced in her strength, and sympathized with her weakness with equal sincerity.

He was no lily-handed gardener, no finger-tip lover, who, with an ivory-handled *sécateur*, snips off minute dead twigs, and selects a rosebud for his buttonhole, but went about his business with the tender ruthlessness that true gardening demands. Up one of the pillars of the veranda there climbed together a great ramping mass of blue convolvulus and an Ard's pillar ; and the constricting plant was quietly intent on strangling the rose. Now, the convolvulus was an interloping adventuress, invading territories that were not her own, and regretfully but inexorably Colonel Fanshawe committed murder, snipping off the sappy stem at its root, and gently disentangling its voluted tendrils. As he stripped it down the new bull-pup came with

sentimental sighs out of the house, and then, becoming aware, no doubt by some subtle brain-wave, that the murdered morning-glory was an enemy, flung himself on the bestrewn tendrils, and got tightly involved therein, and rolled away in a state of wild-eyed and bewildered entanglement, barking hoarsely. Upon which an observant pigeon on the roof remarked quite clearly, "Look at the fool! Look at the fool!" Simultaneously, with a loud false chord, the wild torrents of notes within ceased. There came a sound quite exactly as if somebody had banged down the lid of a piano, and Elizabeth came out on to the veranda. She was very tall, as tall almost as her father, and the long lines of her figure showed slim and boylike through the thin blouse and blue linen skirt against which the evening breeze pressed, moulding them to the limbs within. Her hair lay thick and low above her small face, and her mouth, in spite of the heightened colour of her cheeks and the vividness of her eyes, drooped a little as if fatigued. She had clasped her long-fingered hands behind her head, and she stood there a moment without seeing her father, with amusement gathering in her eyes as she observed the comedy of the constricted puppy. Then, turning her head, she saw him.

"Oh, daddy!" she cried. "Are you back? And, if so, why didn't you tell me? The fact is that you love your garden better than your only daughter."

Colonel Fanshawe had two nails and a piece of bass string in his mouth destined for the support of the disentangled rose, and could give no assurance beyond an incoherent mumbling.

"It is true," said Elizabeth. "And what makes

me feel it more keenly is that I haven't had any tea. Daddy, do leave your silly plants and talk to me. I haven't spoken to a soul all day. Mamma had lunch in her room. She is saving up for this evening, and I haven't seen anybody. In fact, it has all been rather dismal. I've been playing the piano, and I have come to the conclusion that I shall never be able to play at all. So I banged down the lid, and I shall never open it again. Do get down from that silly ladder and talk to me."

Colonel Fanshawe was methodical. He put the two nails in a box and looped up the spray of the rose in a manner which, though temporary, would last till he could get to work again.

"That sounds rather a dismal little chronicle, Lizzie," he said. "So if you feel that we can't talk while I go on gardening——"

"It has nothing to do with my feelings," remarked Elizabeth; "it is a mere question of external impossibilities. Have you had tea?"

"Yes."

"Then come and see me have mine. I shall eat quantities and quantities of tea, and not have any dinner, I think. One can't dine alone, and you and mamma are dining out at the Residency and going to the dance. Daddy, I do think mamma might have let me go to the ball; I'm eighteen, and if one isn't old enough to go to a dance at eighteen, I don't know when one is."

Elizabeth paused a moment, and put her nose in the air.

"I don't believe mamma will want me to come out till it is time for me to go in again," she remarked.

Colonel Fanshawe had an admirable gift of

silence. When he concluded that there was no advantage to be gained by speech he could refrain from it, instead of, like the most part of mankind, making a series of injudicious observations. At the bottom of Elizabeth's remark, as he well knew, there lay stewing a herb of rather bitter infusion, which he had no desire to stir up. But Elizabeth, so it seemed, felt disposed to do the stirring herself.

"Mamma will have the next eight months all to herself," she said, "and she can dance all the time. I wish to state quite explicitly that I think she might have let me go to this dance. I have told her so, and so for fear she should tell you, I do it myself."

Elizabeth's eye wandered on to the path, and she broke off suddenly.

"Oh, my beloved Shah Jehan," she said, "you will certainly strangle yourself."

This appeared highly probable, for Shah Jehan, the young and imperial bull-pup, had managed to entangle himself so strictly in the yards of strong convolvulus which the Colonel had cut down that his eyes were starting out of his head, and only the most remote sort of growl could escape from his enveloped throat. With the cake-knife, which she snatched up from the tea-table, Elizabeth ran to his rescue.

"It's such a blessing, daddy," she said as she returned to him, "that you and I are so very much one person, because we can say anything we like to each other, and it is certain that the other one —how tiresome language is—the one I mean, who listens only really listens to his own thoughts."

"Ah, my dear Elizabeth!" said he suddenly,

laying his hand on her arm. If Elizabeth's mother lived again when Elizabeth played, masked behind her daughter's face, she appeared with no guard of flesh in between when Elizabeth said that.

She drew his hand through her arm and strolled with him up the path.

"It is so, daddy," she repeated; "and when I grumble to you it is only as if I grumbled to myself. Mamma might have let me go to this one dance, and she doesn't, because she wants all the dancing she can get herself, and naturally doesn't want to sit in a row instead. But she'll have to let me come out next autumn. Oh, by the way, I had forgotten the most important thing of all. Have you settled when I am to go to England?"

"Yes, dear; next week. I have telegraphed for your passage."

"What a loathsome and disgusting daddy," remarked Elizabeth.

"Possibly! But the loathsome daddy isn't going to have a tired and white-faced daughter, if he can avoid it. I shall miss you more than you can possibly guess, Lizzie."

Elizabeth gave a great sigh.

"I'm so glad!" she said. "I hope you will be thoroughly unhappy. I shan't like it, either. But mamma won't mind; that's a comfort."

"Elizabeth, I wish——"

"Yes, I know, dear; so do I. You needn't explain. I wish to begin to eat my enormous tea also, so let us sit down. I don't want to go to England; and, besides, staying with Aunt Julia is exactly like lying on a feather-bed, with all the luxuries of the season on a table close to you, and the windows tightly shut. And Edith is like the

clean lace-border to the pillow. I shall be so comfortable."

"Well, that's something, Lizzie."

"It isn't; it's nothing and worse than nothing. I don't want to be comfortable. Nothing that is really alive is ever comfortable. Aunt Julia and Edith and all Heathmoor generally are dead and buried. I am not sure they do not stink——"

"My dear——"

"As it says in the Bible," said Elizabeth, "nobody there is ever hungry or thirsty, nobody is unhappy or happy, nobody wants. They are all like fishes in an aquarium; you can't get at them because there is a sheet of strong glass in between. And there aren't any tigers or burning ghats or cobras or cholera."

"I shouldn't be particularly sorry if there were fewer of those blessings here," remarked her father.

"Perhaps; but they help to make things real. It is so easy to lose all sense of being alive if you are too comfortable."

Elizabeth pointed to the molten west.

"There," she said, "that's a sunset. But in England for the most part they wrap it up in nice soft thick clouds, so that it isn't a real sunset. And dear Aunt Julia wraps up her own life and the life of every one about her in the same way. She mops up every one's vitality as with a sponge by thinking exclusively about not getting wet or tired. Oh, how I love this naked, tired, wicked, mysterious land, with all its deadliness and its dust and its sunsets and its secrets, which I shall never fathom any more than I can fathom Schumann! I'm a savage, you know. I love wild, unhappy things——"

Elizabeth broke off suddenly.

"I don't believe even you understand what I mean, daddy," she said.

"Yes, my dear, I do," said he. "I could tell you exactly what you mean. But have your say first; you have not nearly done yet. I will tell you what you mean when you have finished."

Elizabeth laughed.

"That will be a good thing," she said, "because, though I know that I mean something, I often have not the least idea what it is. Daddy, I wish I was a boy so terribly sometimes, and I know you do too. If I was a boy I would get up now and kiss you, and walk straight off into the direction of where the moon is just going to rise. I would have adventures—oh, such adventures!"

"My dear, you would get malaria, and come home next morning with a violent headache and ask me for some quinine."

She shook her head.

"You are wrong," she said. "I wouldn't come back even to you for years, not until I had learned what it all means. I would be afraid of nothing; I would shrink from nothing. Perhaps I should see Malaria herself in the jungle down there by the Indus—a tall, white-faced woman, with golden irises to her eyes, and I would talk to her and learn about her. I would go into the temple of the Brahmins at Benares and listen to them preaching sedition. I would sit by the corpse as it burned by the river bank, watching it, oh, so quietly, and loving it. I would go into the opium dens and learn how to dream. . . . Learn how to dream! I wonder if that is what I want to do?

I think it must be that. Sometimes when I am playing I begin to dream, and just as I am getting deep I strike a false chord and wake myself up, or mamma comes in and says it is time for me to go driving with her."

Elizabeth had forgotten about the enormous tea she had intended to eat, and still sat upright on the edge of her chair, looking out over the gathering night. Already in the swiftly darkening dusk the colours were withdrawn from the flower-beds, and only the heavy odours gave token of their blossoming. A streak of dwindling orange lingered in the west ; above, in the fathomless blue, stars that five minutes before had been but minute pin-pricks of luminance were grown to yellow lamps and globes of light. Somewhere in the lines a bugle suddenly blared out its message to the stillness and was silent again. A little farther off a tom-tom beat with endless iteration.

Then she spoke again, more rapidly.

"It is only by dreaming that you can get close to the world," she said, "and hope to get at its meaning. People who are completely awake spend all their time in doing things that don't matter. You, for instance, daddy—you and your inspections and reviews. What does it all come to? Would this world be one whit the worse if you didn't do any of it? Yet perhaps I am wronging you, for, anyhow, you can go mooning about your garden for hours together. Let me see—where had I got to?"

Colonel Fanshawe was watching Elizabeth a little uneasily. This strange mood of hers was not new to him. Half a dozen times before he had known her go off into these dim rhapsodies,

and they somewhat disconcerted him. He made an effort to bring her back into realms less shadowy.

"Where had you got to?" he asked. "Upon my word, my dear, I don't think you had got anywhere particular. Wouldn't it be well to begin that enormous tea of which you spoke?"

But the girl was fathoms deep in this queer reverie of speculation. She shook her head at him.

"No; you don't understand yet," she said. "One has to dream first before one can do any good while one is awake. Unless you call baking bread and milking cows doing good. You have to penetrate, penetrate. It is a kingdom with high walls round it, and I expect there are many gates. Perhaps we all have our own gates; perhaps mine is a gate made of music and yours is a garden-gate. Don't misunderstand me, daddy, or think I am talking nonsense, or think, again, that what I mean is religion, though I dare say there is a religion-gate as well. All I know is that you have to pass dreaming through one of the gates in order to get inside the kingdom. And when you do get inside you find that it isn't so much that you have got inside the kingdom as that the kingdom has got inside you. I know it must be so. Each of us, I expect, has to find himself, and when he has found himself. . . . Oh, God knows!"

She broke off, and instantly poured herself out a cup of tea.

"I am so hungry," she said, "and I had quite forgotten. While I eat and drink, daddy, you shall keep your promise and tell me what I mean. You said you knew. Or have I been talking the

most dreadful rubbish? But, if so, I am rubbish myself, for what I have said is Me."

Colonel Fanshawe lit a cigarette.

"No, my dear, you haven't been talking rubbish," he said. "But if I had said exactly the same it would have been rubbish." He meditated a moment or two, for, though he felt what he wanted to say, it was rather difficult for him to find the words for it. At the same time also there was that in what Elizabeth had said which strangely moved him; it recalled to him in this sunny afternoon of life something of what he had felt when he brought home, worshipping and loving, Elizabeth's mother.

"You have talked admirable sense, dear," he said, "for the very simple reason that you are eighteen. But it would be rubbish in my mouth at forty-eight. You feel that you are surrounded by delicious mysteries, into the heart of which you mean to penetrate. You can do it too, and I so earnestly hope you will. While you are yet young you can fall in love."

Elizabeth looked at him in disappointed amazement.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"I assure you it is enough. You will not believe it now——"

"But fall in love?" said the girl again. "With a man? Just with a common man?"

"Yes, just with a common man," said he. "At least, it is quite certain that the immense majority of mankind will call him a common man. You will find that he makes everything beautiful."

"But I know how beautiful it all is already," said she.

"Yes, and it all puzzles you. You don't know what it means. Well, it means what I have told you—love."

"Oh, daddy, is that all?" said the girl again.

"In a way, it is. I mean that you can't go beyond that. But——"

Again he paused, feeling a sudden shyness, even with his own daughter, in speaking of anything that concerned him so intimately.

"But though you can't go beyond love," he said, "you can go into it—penetrate, penetrate, as you said just now, yourself. And the more you penetrate into it the more you will see that there is no end to it, and no beginning either. And then you will call it by another name."

He paused for a moment, and got up as he heard himself somewhat shrilly summoned from within the house.

"It seems to you all rather dull, I am afraid, my dear," he said, "but it isn't."

Elizabeth rose also.

"But why would it be nonsense for you to speak of it as I did?" she asked. "And why is it excellent sense for me to do so?"

"Because when you are forty-eight, my dear, you will have had to learn a certain sort of patience and indulgence, which is quite out of place when you are eighteen. You will have seen that the people who bake bread and milk cows and review troops, as I do, may conceivably be doing—well, doing quite nicely. But you are quite right to think them useless old fogies at present!"

Elizabeth gave him a quick little kiss.

"You are a darling!" she said. "And now I am going to vanish swiftly round the corner

of the veranda. Mamma has called you three times and you haven't answered. You will get into trouble, and so I desert you."

Elizabeth's amiable scheme was executed a little too late. She had barely got half-way down the veranda when her stepmother rustled out of the drawing-room, already dressed for her party. Her light, slight figure was still like a girl's—like a girl's, too, was her evening dress, with its simple, straight cut. Nor did her face—smooth, delicate, and soft—belie the impression ; but her forehead and the outer corners of her eyes were a little lined, as if a sleepless night had momentarily devitalized her youth. And her voice, when she spoke, was old—old and querulous.

"Bob, I have been calling and calling you !" she said. "And are you not dressed yet? What have you been doing? Elizabeth, why did you not send your father to dress? We shall be late, as usual, and if husband and wife are late every one always thinks it is the wife's fault. Do go and dress, my dear ; and Elizabeth, my darling, will you come and talk to me while I wait for him? I am so dreadfully tired ! I am sure I do not know how I shall get through the evening. What a pity you are not a year older, and then you could go instead of me and let me pass a quiet evening at home ! Or why are not you and I going to have a dear little evening alone together?"

Elizabeth retraced her steps.

"I am quite willing to go instead of you, mamma !" she said.

"Dearest, I know how unselfish you are. But you must keep your sweet girlish freshness another year, and not tire yourself with sitting up and dancing all night. I know you think I ought to

have let you go to-night, but you must allow me to judge of that. Indeed, my dear, I feel sure you do."

This little speech was admirably characteristic of Mrs. Fanshawe. At one moment she would be finding fault with everybody, at the next she would shower tenderness on them. It mattered nothing to her that only a few hours ago she and Elizabeth had exchanged peculiarly clear-cut and opposed views on the subject of this dance ; she was quite capable, a few hours later, of assuming that they were quite in accord about it. She never had the smallest qualms on the subject of her own sincerity, as is the habit of thoroughly insincere people. She was merely quite determined to get her own way over any point in which she had a preference, and, having got it, always proceeded to make herself charming in a rather helpless and clinging kind of manner. Whether her husband had ever gone so far as to admit even to himself the fact of her insincerity is doubtful. Where his affection was engaged he lost all power of criticism ; where he loved he swallowed whole.

Mrs. Fanshawe gave a delicate little sigh—a very perfect and appealing little sigh. It might have been supposed, so finished was it, so perfectly phrased, that she had practised it for years in private. Such was not the case ; it was quite natural to her artificial self, and came to her lips as spontaneously as song to a thrush.

"We must see a great deal of each other these next days, Elizabeth," she said, "before you go off to all the gaiety and delights of England. How I long to come with you, for I am sure the hot weather will utterly knock me up ; but of course

my duty is with your father. I should not dream of leaving him while I went home to enjoy myself."

"But you will go up to the hills next month, mamma, will you not?" said the girl. "And stop there till the autumn? And you will like that, won't you?"

Mrs. Fanshawe gave the famous little sigh again.

"Like it? My dear, it is the emptiest, emptiest life," she said; "nothing but gossip and parties all day and dancing in the evening. I would far sooner stop down here with your father, and only go away with him when he can get off. But of course he would not hear of that, for he knows very well that to spend the summer here would kill me. I should not dream of distressing him by suggesting it."

Occasionally Elizabeth's patience gave way before the accumulation of such insincerities. In general she put up with them unrebelliously, adapting herself to the experience of daily life. But now and then she rose in flagrant and unsuspected mutiny. She did so on this occasion, as her father appeared again dressed for this evening's functions.

"Daddy," she said, "mamma has been telling me how much she would like to stop here with you instead of going up to the hills. Wouldn't that be nice for you? It sounds a charming plan, mamma."

Mrs. Fanshawe did not suffer a moment's discomposure. She took Elizabeth's chin daintily in her fingers and gave her a little butterfly kiss, which could not disarrange anybody's complexion.

"Darling, what an idea!" she said. "What

can I have been saying to make you think I meant that! Good-night, my little sweet one. Go to bed early, and I shall come to my room like a mouse, so as not to disturb you. And, in turn, dear, would you mind not beginning to practise till, shall we say, eleven to-morrow morning. Begin then and wake me up with some delicious thing like what you were playing so very early this morning. Good-night, sweet Cinderella!"

Elizabeth's rebellion vanished in a sense of amusement. She knew that she might as well expect to cause a blush of embarrassment on the face of the serene moon, by repeating to a mere mortal some unconsidered remark of hers, as to cause her stepmother a moment's loss of self-composure, and she smiled at the butterfly lips. Even when Mrs. Fanshawe caused her the greatest irritation she could not banish altogether the instinct of protection and tenderness towards that remarkably well-equipped little lady. She was really about as capable of taking care of herself as an iron-clad battleship anchored in a calm sea, with guns agape and torpedo-nets spread, but she conveyed so subtle an impression of dependence and timidity that even the victims of her most trying insincerities relented towards her as towards a pretty child eager for enjoyment. It was so easy to strike the smile off her face.

"Good-night, little mamma!" said Elizabeth. "Have a nice time and dance every dance. And I shan't disturb you to-morrow by my practising, as I am going with daddy up the Khyber."

"My darling, won't that be rather a long day for you? I hoped, perhaps, we should spend to-morrow quietly together, you and I."

"Oh no, not a bit long!" said Elizabeth, again with a little spark of irritation. "I shan't have spent all night dancing like you. Good-night, dear daddy! I shall be ready to start at eight."

Elizabeth made a renewed but absent-minded attack on her tea when the others had gone, countermanded dinner, and, in spite of her lately registered vow never to touch a piano again, went back into the drawing-room and opened it. A modern musician, a modern and ordinary concert-frequenter, indeed, would have pitied the rusticity of her old-fashioned taste, for not only were the works but even the names of later authors unknown to her, and at the present moment she was finding Schumann's Noveletten a source of rapture and mystery to her. But, however old-fashioned in taste, she had the root of the matter in her profound love of melody and her secret, unswerving sense that in music was contained the riddle and the answer of the world. She, even as all others who have felt the incommunicable spell that lies in beauty of sound, knew that to put her feeling into words, or even into the cramping outlines of definite thought, was to distort and parody it, for the essence of the whole matter was that its spell was wordless. Images, of course, thronged in spate through her mind as she played or listened to music; sometimes it was a figure with veiled face that sang; sometimes it was a band of militant spirits who marched; sometimes through many-coloured mists, that grew thinner and more opalescent as a climax approached, there shone an ineffable light. But whatever image there came to her, she felt its inadequacy; it was at the most what a photograph is compared to the landscape

which it records. Music was music ; to those who understood, that would be a more satisfactory statement than any array of images which it suggested.

To-night as she played she found running, like a strong undertow beneath sunlit and placid surfaces, certain words of her father. Was it, indeed, love that inspired this beauty? If so, how was it that she who so ceaselessly worshipped its manifestation had never a glimpse of the spirit that inspired it? . . . He had said more than that. He had said—here the ripple of the triplets enthralled and enchained her for a moment—he had said that for her the love of a common man would interpret things for her.

Elizabeth was playing with divided mind. Her fingers, that is to say, already schooled to the notes, rendered bar after bar to her inner, her contemplative self, while her thoughts, that swarm of active honey-bees that bring the crude treasure to the hive, were busy on their quests. Love, he had said, would teach her. Had love taught Schumann this moon-melody, this star-sown heaven of song? . . . Had the thought of Madame Schumann made vocal to him the magic spell? . . . This was a thing to smile at. Daddy did not understand, of course, what music was. He did not know how far it transcended in reality all else that can be felt or thought.

But, to do him justice, that was not the sum, the conclusion of his words. The love of a man, he had said, would teach her love, and the dwelling in that would teach her that love had neither end nor beginning, and she would call it by another name.

Instantly and ludicrously an image presented

itself, the image of the regimental church, with its pitch-pine pews, its crude windows, its encaustic tiles, its braying harmonium. Yet all these unlovely objects somehow symbolized to her father all and more than all that music symbolized to her. And he was not imaginative ; he was not poetical : he was not artistic. But to him, here was the one eternally satisfying answer to all questions that could ever be asked.

Elizabeth's fingers had come to the end of the first Novelette, but her unconscious mind, even as her thinking mind, heeded them no longer. The whole of her mind, conscious and unconscious alike, peered eagerly into this, asking itself what it saw there. And it saw nothing except the coloured glass and the pitch-pine ; heard nothing but the wheeze of the harmonium, and the somewhat bucolic merriment of a chant in C major.

She rose from the piano and strolled out into the yellow, honey-coloured moonlight—a moonlight not pale and cold, but partaking of the ardour and the weariness of the Indian day. She recalled all that religion, direct religious worship, that is to say, and adoration of a personal and inner principle, had meant to her life, and, fully honest with herself, she saw how intensely little, how infinitesimally small that had been. There were her childish prayers, first of all, sentences which she could never remember having learned, for they came out of her earliest mists of childhood, and she could no more recollect being taught either them or their meaning than she could recollect being taught to wash her face. They were both on exactly the same plane ; they belonged to the ritual of getting up and going to bed. There was

washing to be done ; there were buttons to be negotiated ; there were prayers to be said. She had taken it on trust that these performances had to be gone through ; the reason for them had never interested her. Then a further piece of observance had been introduced into the routine of life, and with her best frock and hat she had stood and sat and knelt, sometimes with tedium, sometimes in absorbed attention to interesting members of the congregation, while words were recited, and hymns sung. It was rather pleasant to recognize among the formulas of public worship her own bedside ejaculations, just as it is pleasant to recognize familiar faces in a crowd. It was pleasant also to be encouraged to join her small voice in the more cheerful intervals of singing. Church, in fact, was a not unattractive way of spending an hour on Sunday morning, and was part of Sunday in precisely the same degree and with exactly the same meaninglessness as her prayers were part of the ritual of dressing and undressing. Much of what was recited there was connected with the Jews who had astounding adventures in Egypt and in the wilderness.

She had heard, she had listened, she had been taught, prepared for confirmation, and taken to communion. She supposed that she believed that she was a Christian, but she believed, for that matter, in Australia, and, for that matter, she knew she was English. But neither her belief in Australia nor in the truth of Christianity was coloured with emotion or directed her actions. She would not, as far as she was aware, behave any differently if Australia was suddenly swallowed up in the ocean, or if the historical facts on which

Christianity was based were proved to be fallacious. In no way did either fact enter into her life. She was not, for instance, kind and honest and truthful because she was a Christian.

But she knew that in beauty she sought a meaning that she had never yet found, that at times she agonized to discover, and catch hold of, something on which to rest, from which to derive . . .

She had wandered down the length of the dusky garden alleys between the roses and yellow mimosas until she had come to the low stone wall at the bottom of her father's garden. Here the cantonments ended, and half a mile of dry dusty land lay between her and the native city, which rose a black blot against the blue of the night sky. A few low huts of cattle-tenders were scattered about, and the feather-like plumes of tamarisk, and clear-cut aloes broke the level monotony. One such aloe close at hand flowered a few days before, and now the great stalk, fifteen feet high, with its cluster of blossoms at the end of the horizontal twigs, stood like a telegraph pole across the face of the moon, and Elizabeth wondered at this prodigious force that from the empty air and barren soil raised in so few days this triumphant engine and distributor of life. For years this plant had silently and slowly grown, a barren growth in a barren land ; then suddenly it had been caught in the whirlpool of production, of fruition, and with a stupendous output, which should cause its own exhausted death, had erected that beacon flame with that torch of transmitted life. Had it felt a death-bed revelation, as it were? Was it satisfied to bear witness to life and to die? What did it mean? What did it all mean?

A small trodden track lay just below the three-foot wall on which she leaned, and at the moment she heard something stir there close to her. Looking over, she saw that an old man was squatting there. He had a long white beard that fell nearly to his waist ; he was naked but for the loin-cloth about his middle, and by his side lay a tall crutch and an empty begging-bowl of wood. But round his shoulders, which glistened in the moonlight, she saw that there was bound the three-fold cord that marks a Brahmin.

Apparently he heard her movement as she leaned over, and turned his head towards her. Deadly weakness and exhaustion were printed there, but more clearly than that there shone from it a quiet indwelling joy, an expression of rapture, of ecstasy.

Elizabeth spoke to him in the vernacular.

" You want food? " she said.

" I want nothing, lady," said he.

Elizabeth suddenly felt that there was something here for *her* ; that this aged, quiet face, so full of joy, so shadowed by weakness, had a message. The feeling was instinctive and unaccountable.

" I will get you food in a moment," she said.

" I do not want food," said he.

Elizabeth put her hand on the top of the low wall and easily vaulted over.

" But you are tired and hungry," she said, " and you must have travelled far from your native place to come up here. Where are you from? "

" From Benares. I have searched all my life, but to-day my search is over."

A sudden wave of uncontrollable emotion seized the girl.

"Oh, tell me what you have searched for?" she said. "What *is* it?"

"It is the Life itself," he said. "And I have found."

He fell back, and lay quite still, with open eyes and smiling mouth. Even as he said he had found.

CHAPTER II

THE RIDDLE GROWS

In these days of the diffusion of the products of trade and the benefits doubtful and otherwise of civilization, when the Amir of Afghanistan has a piano, and the Grand Llama of Thibet a bicycle, it must not shock the reader to know that Elizabeth travelled up the Khyber Pass in the company of her father and the Commander-in-Chief in a motor-car. That military hero who had danced three-quarters of the night with the young ladies of Peshawar, not singling out any one for his favours, but cutting up his heart into a large number of small pieces, and giving one to each, was delighted to find there was yet another charming maiden whom he had not yet seen, and, rolling his jolly sides with laughter, supposed that there had been a conspiracy among the beauties of Peshawar to keep the fairest of them all out of the ballroom. Gallantry and excessive animal spirits are apt to be rather disgusting in elderly and obese persons, but the vitality of this amiable old warrior was so genuine in its boyishness that the primmest of the sex that he so indiscriminately adored were disarmed by his monstrous flatteries. But when our party had passed the fort of Jamrud that guards the Indian end of the historic road, and entered on the defile which from immemorial days has been the coveted key that has locked and unlocked

the treasure of India, each yard of which has been bought and paid for in blood, Sir Henry's gallant loquacity was abated, and the magic of the most historic highway in the world cast its spell on him.

Elizabeth had hardly slept last night, but that which had kept her still and wakeful during the dark hours had been so strong a stimulus to her mind, that morning saw no haggard cheeks and drooping eyelids, but an alert and fresh-coloured face. That strange sudden death of the white-haired traveller had not in the least shocked or terrified her, for her whole soul was full of the discovery of how wonderful and beautiful a thing is death to one who has lived, and who, like this aged Brahmin, had looked upon it not as a cold hand that locks the gates of the sepulchre, but as a friend who opens a door into a fuller life, an ampler perception. Hitherto she had never looked on death, and in so far as she thought of it at all, viewed it as a remote and cruel contingency, horrible to contemplate and best forgotten. She had no idea that it could be like *that*, that calm moment of healing that had not distorted the peace and the joy on the old man's face, but had merely wiped off, as if it had been some travel-stain, some superficial blur, the weariness and the age that had a moment before overlaid it. She found, too, that she had no horror at the touch of the lifeless shell, and had helped the servants to move the body. But before she had called for assistance she had sat a minute or two alone with the body, the face of which was calmer and more serene than the flooding moonlight that illuminated it, and had kissed, in a sort of inexplicable reverence and tenderness, the lined forehead.

And all night long that face had remained with her. If she shut her eyes it hovered before her in the darkness of her closed lids, answering the question she did not know how to frame. Triumph, conviction, certainty, attainment was the response. She could not doubt that this death by the way-side of but one of the teeming millions, and that one so aged, so stricken, was a royal entry from an ante-chamber into a throne-room. She had seen a soul attain ; the dead smiling face no less than the last words which the triumphant lips had spoken assured her of it. All his life he had sought, knowing what he sought ; as yet she but felt the conviction that there was something to seek.

For a while, however, all this sank out of sight in her mind, as if she had dropped treasure into a well. It was there safe, and when she dredged for it she would find it again, but for the present, as they wound upwards on the narrow road, the magic of the way enchained her. Barer and more precipitous rose the barren hill-sides of neutral native territory, between which wound the narrow riband of the English road. All the way along it, within communicable distance from each other, the sentries of the Khyber Rifles guarded the pass, to give safe conduct to the caravan that came with carpets and dried fruits and incense from the unknown country beyond, and to that which, with the products of civilization, oil and sheet iron and calico, passed from the plain into the mountains of Afghanistan. They overtook and passed the caravan that had rested last night at the entrance to the pass, going westwards ; six hundred camels, bearded and with soft, padding steps, carried the amorphous mass of merchandise. Some were

gentle beasts, mild-eyed and depressed, others were muzzled with rope and foamed at the mouth. Myriad were the types of those who drove them ; there were pale-faced boys with flaxen hair ; there were hawk-nosed eager Pathans of the type so familiar to Elizabeth in the parades of her father's regiment, snub-nosed Mongolians, Thibetans, with their high cheek-bones and wide-lipped mouths, and of them all there was not one in whose face this morning Elizabeth did not see signs of some secret quest, some unconjecturable search. One perhaps desired money, one an end to this mounting road ; one was hungry, another thirsty, but behind all these superficial needs she read into each face a desire, a quest. Often, as if in answer to her eager glance, she received a questioning stare, as if the gazer sought from her some signal that he was waiting for. All nature that morning had a question on its lips for Elizabeth, and an answer if she could but interpret it. The grey climbing hill-sides already aquiver in the hot sun seemed ready to tell her why they stood there broad-flanked and menacing. The brook that came cool and bubbling from below a rock by the wayside, fringing its course with cresses and feathery grass, had learned in the darkness of the earth, in the subterrestrial caves from which it sprang, the reason of its going. Scattered by the roadside here and there were Afghan villages, and at the mouths of excavated dwellings in the hill-side stood the wild-eyed native folk who were born and lived and loved and fought and murdered, maybe, all in obedience to some law of being that caused the aloe to shoot up in erect strong stem and blossom, and that lit the fires of victory in the eyes of the dying Brahmin.

All seemed ready to tell her the answer could she but frame her question.

Like an obsession this sense of revelation ready to show itself to her, could she but put herself on the plane of thought where it lay, besieged her all day, and as they returned to the caravanserai at the foot of the pass as the sun, declining behind the western hills, turned them for a moment into glowing amber, it seemed to elude her but by a hair's-breadth. There all was ready for the reception of the caravan that had marched through the pass into India that day ; the sellers of bread were pulling out of their circular ovens excavated in the ground the flat cakes of unleavened bread, the brass samovars hissed at the booths of the tea-sellers, and cauldrons of hot soup boiled and bubbled. Already the van of the wayfarers was entering the guarded gates that were pierced in the mud walls, and the camels, weary with the long stage, bent their unwieldy joints and lay down for their drivers to strip off their load. Some were too tired to eat, and, resting their queer prehistoric heads on their bended forelegs, closed their long-lashed eyes and slept. Others, hungry and restless, foamed and lathered and snapped greedily at the mounds of dried fodder that their drivers placed before them. Tired men got their bowls of soup or tea from the stalls, and, leaning against the sides of their beasts, ate their supper, and wrapping their heads in their dusty gay-coloured shawls, slept by their sleeping animals. Others, inclined for a chat, collected round the shops of the provision-sellers against the wall of the serai, and smoked and talked when their supper was done ; others, three or four clubbing together,

lit fires of the brushwood they had gathered during the day, and cooked their own food at cheaper rate than obtained in the stores. Ponies nickered and twitched at their heel-ropes, the sharp, pungent smell of the wood fires and the wreaths of aromatic smoke drifted slowly along the sluggish currents of the almost windless air, and gradually the empty space of the serai became a mosaic of sleeping men and beasts. The hills that the sunset had turned into molten tawny gold grew dark again with the gathering night, and in the depth of the velvet vault above the wheeling stars grew large.

And behind all the various forms of life, behind the molten hills, behind the sky, behind the limbs of the bearded camels, behind the chatter and smoke of the provision booths, there lurked, so it seemed to Elizabeth, one impulse, one energy common to all. In her head lay some remembered melody of Schumann, that seemed to beat to the same indwelling rhythms to which the stars pulsated.

Her father was standing alone beside her ; a little way off the genial Commander-in-Chief was tasting the soup that bubbled in the tin-plated cauldrons, pronouncing it excellent, and bidding his aide-de-camp, a slim young, weary Englishman, translate his verdict of it to the gratified booth-keeper. Some word of the identity of this great boisterous hedonist had been passed about the serai, but the tired drovers of the caravan paid little heed. And yet, here incarnate, was the figure-head of the English power that guaranteed their safe journey through the turbulent lands of the frontier, and that would avenge with wicked

little spitting guns and a troop of khaki-clad soldiers any raid that the ungoverned tribe might make. But Sir Henry, in spite of this, roused but little attention ; the tired drovers slept ; those who were more alert were but employed with jokes and snatches of song round the samovars and soup-cauldrons. The hills and the stars attended as little ; everything and everybody was intent on his own inward calls, just as last night the Brahmin who lay by the wayside had no need of food, and but thought of the finding of that for which all his years had searched.

And then Elizabeth's questing soul suddenly gave up the pursuit of a hidden cause, and felt content with the obvious explanation. She took her father's arm.

" Oh, daddy, I've had such a lovely day ! " she said. " What heaps of different things there are in the world, and what heaps of different businesses. And it all makes such a jumbled incoherent whole ! In half an hour we shall be back home again, and it will be time to dress, and mamma will tell us all she has done to-day. After dinner I will play the piano to you till you snore, and as soon as you snore I shall wake you up again and make you write to Aunt Julie to say when I shall arrive at Heathmoor."

He pressed her hand as it lay in the crook of his arm.

" It is a less tragic view than that of last night," he said.

" I know. At this moment I don't mind the least about going to England. I'm—I'm going to take things as they come."

Elizabeth paused a moment, as with the vivid-

ness of ocular hallucination the Brahmin's face once more swam before her eyes.

"But that doesn't mean I am not going to be serious," she said. "I want 'richly to enjoy.' Doesn't that come in the Bible somewhere? I expect there are many routes that arrive at the same place."

To anybody unacquainted with the sum of Elizabeth's musings that day, this was necessarily a cryptic speech. It grew more cryptic yet.

"Perhaps drink leads the drunkard there," she said, "and music the musician. Doesn't one develop, daddy, through one's passions, and not through one's renunciations? I can't see how starving your desires can possibly help one."

"My dear, there are desires and desires," he said.

"And where do they all come from? Surely from the search."

He was silent a moment, and at that moment anything short of enthusiastic acceptance of her illumination was a coldness, a hand of ice to Elizabeth.

"Daddy, you don't understand," she said. "As long as we want, it doesn't much matter what we want. Isn't it half the battle to be eager?"

He shook his head.

"Again I should talk nonsense if I agreed with you," he said. "Eagerness is a sword, my dear; but it is not armour."

"I don't want armour," she said quickly. "I am not afraid of being hurt."

"Ah, don't get hurt, my darling!" he said.

"Not I. And if I do get hurt, daddy, I shall come crying to you, and you will have to comfort

me. Oh, oh—look at all those tired men, with no beds to lie on, and no pillows and no tooth powder or sponges! Don't you envy them? They will wake up in the morning, and find *themselves* there, and, after all, nothing else can matter. I don't want to be——" Elizabeth suddenly broke off, interrupting her speech and thought alike.

"Daddy, that darling Sir Henry has had soup, and now he is eating unleavened cakes, and a peculiarly murderous-looking Pathan is tempting him with a pomegranate. Do stop him; he is dining with us in an hour's time, and mamma will be so vexed if he doesn't eat the most enormous dinner."

Colonel Fanshawe, with Elizabeth still on his arm, stepped over a couple of sleeping prostrate forms.

"Yes, we will go to him," he said, "and you shall tell me more about the simple life afterwards. It is getting late."

Sir Henry had just cracked a pomegranate in his enormous beefy hands.

"God bless me!" he was saying. "I never saw anything look so good. Fanshawe, be kind enough to tell this man in your best Pushtoo, that there's a fortune in pomegranates. Why, it's quite delicious; never tasted such a fine fruit."

Colonel Fanshawe made some amiable equivalent of all this in Pushtoo, and spoke to Sir Henry again.

"He says that his trees will bear in greater abundance than ever now, sir. But it is rather late. I think we ought to be getting home. You

won't have more than time to eat your dinner in comfort before the train——"

Sir Henry rejected a mass of seeds.

"Yes, yes; we'll go" he said. "Why, here's my Miss Elizabeth come to insist. I always obey the ladies, Colonel; you obey the ladies always, and you'll have a confoundedly pleasant time. Now, Miss Elizabeth, quick march, is it?"

A sleepless day following on a dancing night, had produced in Mrs. Fanshawe that uncertainty of temper which, when it exhibits itself in children, is called fractiousness. The Commander-in-Chief, who dined with them *en famille*, had been obliged to leave in order to catch his train before dinner was over, and in consequence the very expensive strawberries which she had designed to form an exceptional dessert were eaten by herself and Elizabeth, while the Colonel went to the station to speed his parting chief. The chief also during dinner had paid, according to her estimate of what was proper, insufficient attention to his hostess, and more than sufficient to Elizabeth, on whom he rained showers of robust gallantries. In addition, some vague story of a dead man found in the garden had agitated her, while not a single soul from the rest of the station had called to tell her how complete was the eclipse that all other women suffered at the ball last night in consequence of her effulgence. This was enough to start a promising crop of grievances and gloomy forebodings in Mrs. Fanshawe's mind, which she served up, so to speak, young, succulent, and tender like mustard and cress. The crop was of extremely varied growth—a perfect macedoine of mixed and

bitter vegetables, among which her habitual helplessness and childlike manner had been completely volatilized.

"I think it is no wonder," she said, "that the military future of India gives politicians grave anxiety at home, when there is such a doddering old goose at the head of affairs."

"Oh, mamma, it's rather a telling sort of doddering!" said Elizabeth. "They gave him a tremendous reception at Jamrud."

"And laughed at him behind his back, I know," said Mrs. Fanshawe, with decision. "And his conduct at dinner, too, with his absurd jokes. I had hoped, Elizabeth, that your good sense would have enabled you to see through them, and for my part, the most charitable explanation I can think of is that he had had too much wine, which I am sure I hope he will sleep off before he makes another laughing-stock of himself at Lahore. Stuffing himself with soup and pomegranates, too, like a schoolboy at a confectioner's!"

Elizabeth forebore to suggest that a school confectioner who sold soup and pomegranates would be a unique species of tradesman, and proceeded to eat strawberries one by one from the dish. Her stepmother did not often spout with vinegar, when she did the wisest thing was not to attempt to staunch the flow, but merely wait till it ran dry. But it appeared that her silence acted as spur sufficient.

"And as you have nothing to tell me about the pleasures of your expedition," observed Mrs. Fanshawe, "I must be content with picturing it to myself, as, indeed, I have been doing all day, thinking that now you had got to Landi Kotal,

and now to the other place, the name of which I forget."

"We started at eight," began Elizabeth.

"I am quite aware of that, dear," said Mrs. Fanshawe. "I had lain awake till then after the ball, and was just beginning to think I should get to sleep, when I heard you laughing and calling so merrily. I only thought, 'Now my dear ones are starting on their expedition,' nothing more at all. Except to look out of my window, though the light hurt my eyes, to see if you were likely to have a fine day. But, since you have nothing to tell me——"

"Indeed, mamma, we all talked about our day at dinner," said Elizabeth. "I should have thought you had heard enough of it."

Mrs. Fanshawe closed her eyes until Elizabeth ceased speaking, and then went on exactly where she had left off.

"What you have been doing," she said. "I must try to entertain you with what happened last night. The room was very hot and full, and indeed, with Sir Henry bouncing about, there was little space for anybody else to dance at all. Such an elephant I have never yet seen outside a menagerie or at the Durbar, and I should not wonder if when he retired next year, as I am told he does, Barnum offered something handsome for him. But it would be a risky purchase; he might burst any day and cover the place with pomegranate seeds."

Elizabeth gave a little inward gurgle of laughter at this picturesque phrasing. A peculiarity of Mrs. Fanshawe, and one which she shared with many of the human race, was that, when vexed, her sense of humour entirely deserted her, though her humour

itself indulged in admirable touches. There was, for instance, humour in her swift thumb-nail sketch of an exploding warrior in a menagerie, but her perception of her own felicity failed to recognize it. Under these circumstances it was not diplomatic for others to greet it ; their amusement was not wanted. Mrs. Fanshawe proceeded in her inimitable way, in a rather faint voice.

" Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday," she said. " I hope, Elizabeth, you will be able to let me see a little of you before you bury yourself in your trunks. I hope, too, you will keep a hand on your natural exuberance during your voyage. You must not be carried away by such foolish sallies and witticisms as seemed to amuse you during dinner, and make undesirable acquaintances. There is sure to be a number of skylarking young men on board going home, who will want to romp with any girl handy. And be careful to dress very plainly and quietly. You will earn in respect what you will lose in being stared at. Of course you will chiefly sit in the ladies' saloon, especially after dark, and not play any of those foolish games with buckets and bits of rope, which occasion so much silly shouting and giggling, unless there are one or two elderly women playing ! "

She observed, with a shaded glance, that Elizabeth had finished the strawberries.

" Perhaps you would pass me the strawberries, dear," she said. " They are quite excellent."

" Oh, I'm so sorry ! " began Elizabeth.

" Ah, you have eaten them all, have you? It is not of the slightest consequence. I only wanted one or two, and no doubt I am quite as well without them. Indeed, I am only glad that you have

enjoyed them so much, and wish for your sake there were more. Ah, here is your father back from seeing poor Sir Henry off. Take the dish off the table, darling, so that he shall not see we have had strawberries, for they are his favourite fruit."

The goaded Elizabeth turned.

"Daddy," she said, "I have eaten all the strawberries, so that there are none for you and mamma."

Mrs. Fanshawe gave her a reproachful glance.

"Really, Elizabeth!" she said. "So you are back, Bob. Did you see the poor old man into his train? I was saying to Elizabeth that I hoped it was only wine, but I am afraid his brain must be going. I should not wonder if he became quite childish."

Colonel Fanshawe lifted his eyebrows in mild surprise.

"Sir Henry?" he said. "I hope neither conjecture is true, my dear. By the way, he sent his warmest thanks to you and hoped so much that when you went up to Simla you would stay with him a week or two. He will be there all next month. But of course if you are afraid of his being sent for to go to the asylum——"

Mrs. Fanshawe did not waste time over her transitions; she did not modulate from key to key, but, without sequence of transitional chords, put her finger firmly down on the notes she intended to play.

"My darling, how literally you take my little joke!" she said. "Dear Sir Henry! He is like a great boy, is he not, with his jokes and high spirits! I declare he made me feel a hundred years old. I must say that it is very civil of him, and of course I shall go. I regard the invitations of the

Commander-in-Chief as a royal command, when one is in India."

An unusual impulse of candour took possession of her.

"Besides," she said, "it will be much more amusing and comfortable than at the hotel."

Elizabeth, as had now been settled, was to start for England the next week, and since, after the visit of the Commander-in-Chief, a quiet reaction settled down on Peshawar, Mrs. Fanshawe was at liberty to work herself to the bone, as she herself phrased it, to make preparations for her departure. As a matter of strict fact, her labours in this regard were to order her *ayah* to wash out a Thermos flask of hers, the possession of which, she declared, would make "all the difference" to Elizabeth's comfort on her journey down to Bombay, and to determine to finish a woollen crochet scarf for her, which would make "all the difference" when she was on the boat. The necessity of finishing this—for her determination was invincible on the point—caused her to insist on a good deal of reading aloud in the evening, which she always enjoyed, while the breaking of the Thermos flask—quite irreplaceable in Peshawar—by her *ayah* gave her an excuse, which she had long been wanting, for dismissing her, since it was quite impossible to trust a woman who could be careless over such a treasure, and to keep a servant whom she could not trust, was to violate one of her most sound household laws. Under the stress of these duties it was only prudent to rest for rather longer hours than usual after lunch, with the crochet scarf put on a table by her sofa, in case her afternoon insomnia was persistent, and except

for lunch, she was practically invisible until evening. Under these circumstances, though she continued to plan long quiet days for herself and Elizabeth before the wrench of parting came, the girl saw more than usual of her father, for, to speak frankly, it was impossible to have the sense of seeing anybody else when Mrs. Fanshawe was present. She was obtrusive in the faint but shrill trumpeting manner of a mosquito.

To Elizabeth, therefore, and, though loyalty prevented his ever forming such a thought to himself, perhaps to her father, too, these days had a recaptured charm. It was now a couple of years since her stepmother had made the third—not shadowy—in her home ; before that, for her mother had died in her infancy, she and her father had been inseparable companions. And in these two years Elizabeth had grown up ; from the high romantic mists of childhood, she had stepped down into the level plains, and saw womanhood stretching out in front of her. As was natural, that expanse had come slowly and gradually into sight, and it was not till these few days of companionship with her father brought back the habit of earlier years that she began to realize how far she had travelled. She found, too, that the adequacy of the prattling companionship of childhood no longer satisfied her ; her heart needed a more mature diet, her brain was awake and tingling with a hundred questions and surmises such as a few days before had inspired her wondering conjectures when she found him at work in his garden. Then, for the first time quite consciously, she had asked herself that momentous question as to the meaning, the principle that lay behind all the

phenomena which she had taken for granted ; then, too, she had realized that to her father the explanation lay in, or, at any rate, was bound up with, something inherent in the prayers and hymns at church. There to him was the finality which she had been consciously seeking, about which for the first time she felt any real curiosity.

But she was as diffident about putting any question to him about it as he, all these years, had been of initiating any speech on the subject. A man's religious convictions necessarily take the colour and texture, so to speak, of his mind, and this quiet, unassertive man was no more in the habit of speaking about them than about his loyalty to the King or his habits of personal cleanliness. Such subjects as these, rightly or wrongly, are the last to find vocal expression ; he would have found it as difficult and as unnatural to speak to Elizabeth on religious topics as to discourse on the meaning of the National Anthem, or ask her at breakfast if she had performed her ablutions with thoroughness. In his own case, his conduct, his work, and his immaculate appearance bore witness to the reality of his convictions on these three respects, and, though he shared with no mother the responsibility of parentage, he assumed her welfare in these regards. It was not because the reality of them was faint to him that he was reticent, it was because the reality was a matter of instinct, deeply felt and inwardly imperative. Throughout the reigns of various governesses, he had from time to time reminded those ladies of his wish that a Bible lesson should inaugurate the labours of the day, and, having thus provided for the material of religious instruction, he believed that the child's

nature would, out of that pabulum, secrete, in the manner of well-nourished bodily glands, the secret essences that sustained and built. But there had resulted from this method of reticence, a symptom which should have troubled him if he wanted confirmation of its success, for Elizabeth, so open, so garrulous with him on all other subjects, had never spoken to him on this one. This he set down to the same instinct that made himself shy of speech on such subjects, namely, the inherent conviction that does not care to discuss matters like loyalty and cleanliness. It had never occurred to him that her silence was due to indifference, to incuriousness, and that religious instruction was to her no more than a part of the curriculum of the week-day, church an hour's slightly distasteful feature of Sunday morning.

But now Elizabeth's curiosity was aroused. "The scheme of things entire" had begun to make audible to her its first faint flute-like call, a call that, before there has fallen on the spirit any experience of agony, of darkness, of loneliness, is as fascinating as the music of Pan or the voice of Sirens, and she longed to know how it sounded in the ears of others. For herself, she was confused, bewildered by the remote uncapturable melody, that at present only gave hints in broken phrases to her untrained ear.

The two were riding back one day from a horseback saunter along the lanes among the fruit orchards. The blossom was beginning to fall, and when a puff of wind disturbed its uncertain clinging the ground below would be showered with snowy pear-blossom or pink with the flower of the peach. Elizabeth, in tune with the spring, was inclined to lament this.

"I would almost go without peaches," she said, "if that would save the blossom from falling."

He laughed.

"Yet it would be a hard choice," he said, "to determine whether one would look at a tree covered with blossom, instead of having dessert. I think I should let Nature take its course, Lizzie, after all."

"Is it meant that the blossom has to fall before the fruit comes?" she asked.

"Well, yes. To want it otherwise would be parallel to wanting girls and boys not to grow up."

"And you do?"

"Naturally, though it is at the expense of their rosy petals."

This seemed to give Elizabeth sufficient material for a pondering silence, which lasted a couple of minutes.

"*I* want to grow up," she observed, "and keep all my youth as well."

He smiled at her.

"Hard, but worth attempting," he said.

"Oh . . . do you mean it is possible, daddy?"

"Certainly! You can keep all of youth that is really worth having. But, as I said, hard. For instance, you can continue to have all the glow of enthusiasm of youth till it is time to think about —about turning in."

"Dying? I don't want ever to think about it. I think it is a perfectly disgusting prospect. Don't you hate the idea of it, daddy?"

He let his eyes dwell on her a moment.

"I can't say that I do, Lizzie," he said. "Don't misunderstand me. I enjoy life tremendously; I'm not in the least tired of it. But, as for hating

the idea of death, why no! You see, you see, it's only another stage in growing up, which is a process with which, as I said, I am in sympathy."

They were passing through a lane deeply sunk between its adjacent fields; a cool draught flowed down it, and Elizabeth shivered.

"Oh, daddy, to be put in the cold earth!" she said. "That, anyhow, is a quite certain accompaniment of death; there is no doubt about that. And about the rest, who knows?"

"My dear, you don't doubt, do you?" he asked.

"I don't know that I do. One is taught; I was taught. I suppose I believe in the arithmetic I learned, and in the geography I learned——"

She broke off suddenly as a little wind, as it were, blew across the placid sunlit sea of her consciousness, shattering the brightnesses.

"But because I have learned a thing it does not become part of me, as people tell me," she said. "You have to leaven a thing with love in order to assimilate it. I've always known that those things are bone of your bone to you, part of you, vital part of you, part that could not be amputated. Even the fact that you have never talked to me about them has shown that. You don't tell me that you love me, simply because it is part of you to do so; nor do I remind you that I have ten fingers and ten toes."

She checked her horse as they emerged from the lane into the stream of the traffic that was passing into the native city.

"That's why we have never talked about it, daddy," she said in sudden enlightenment. "It was too real to you, and it didn't touch me."

She had never seen him so troubled.

"Didn't touch you?" he asked. "You don't believe——"

Elizabeth laid her hand on his knee.

"Daddy dear, I believe in all things living and beautiful, and true. Don't take it to heart—pray don't. Does—does the blossom know what fruit is coming? But surely the fruit comes."

Swiftly, suddenly at this supreme instant of sunset, all the world was changed; it was as if it passed into the heart of an opal. The dust of the main road into which the two had just turned was transfigured into mist of gold and rose; the wayfarers who passed along, plodding home with camels and mild-eyed buffaloes were changed into citizens of some rainbow-kingdom. More brilliant grew the excellent opalescence, and then all the tints of it were sucked up into one soft crimson that flooded earth and sky. Then, as the darkness began to overlay it, it grew dusky and yet duskier, till the incarnadined air was robbed of its glories. But high above them northwards and eastwards flamed the rose-coloured snows.

BOOK I

CHAPTER III

COMFORTABLE MRS. HANCOCK

It is almost doubtful whether it is right to call Heathmoor a village, since there is something plebeian about the word, implying labourers' cottages and public-houses and an admixture of corduroy in the trousers of the male inhabitants with strings tied, for reasons eternally inexplicable, below their knees. Even less is Heathmoor a town, if by a town we denote an assemblage of houses cheek to jowl, streets with tramways or omnibuses and a scarcity of trees and gardens. Indeed, no known word implying the collected domicile of human beings—which Heathmoor certainly is—will describe it, and the indication of it necessitates a more verbose method.

It lies at so convenient a distance from the metropolis, and is served by so swift and proper a succession of trains at those hours when Heathmoor travels, that it combines, as its inhabitants unanimously declare, all the advantages of town with the pleasures and fine air of the country. Twenty minutes in a well-padded railway-carriage with bevelled mirrors and attractive photographs of beaches and abbeys and nice clear rivers lands the business men to whom Heathmoor almost entirely

belongs in one of the main and central arteries of the London streets, and twenty-three minutes suffices to take them and their wives and daughters home again after they have dined in town and been to the play. The question of those extra minutes is a staple of conversation in Heathmoor, and there is a great deal of high feeling about it, for nobody can see, especially after hours of conversation on the subject, why the railway company should not quicken up the return trains in the evening. Another peculiarity of those otherwise admirable trains is that the first-class carriages are invariably full and the rest of the vehicles comparatively empty. Tickets, moreover—those mean little oblongs of cardboard—are seldom seen, and ticket collectors never make their demands. If some energetic young man, newly promoted, ventures to open a first-class carriage-door between Heathmoor and London, by the train that leaves Heathmoor at 9.6 a.m., for instance, or the later one at 9.42 a.m., its occupants look at him in disgusted astonishment. One, perhaps, sufficiently unbends to murmur, "Season," but probably no notice is taken of him till the guard, hurrying up, gives him a couple of hot words, and apologizes to the gentlemen. On the whole, they are not made uncomfortable by such intrusions; interruption, in fact, rarely occurring, somewhat emphasizes the privileged aloofness of these Heathmoor magnates, just as an occasional trespasser in well-ordered domains makes to glow the more brightly the sense of proprietorship. The impertinence receives but a shrug, and a settlement behind the page of the *Financial Times* follows.

The second of these trains, namely, the 9.42 a.m.

from Heathmoor, performs a more sociable journey, for there is less of the *Financial Times* in it and more of the ladies of Heathmoor, who, with business to transact in the shops, go up to town in the morning with amazing frequency, returning, for the most part, by an equally swift transit, which lands them back at home again at twenty minutes past one. All the morning, in consequence, between those hours the roads at Heathmoor, which are level and well drained owing to its famous gravelly soil, which renders it so salubrious a settlement, are comparatively empty, for those who do not go to London find in their houses and gardens sufficient occupation to detain them there till lunch-time. Once again, between five and six the male population swarms homewards, and a row of cabs uniformly patronized awaits the arrival of the midnight train from town, which enables its travellers to have stayed to the very end of most theatrical performances.

A small mercantile quarter clusters round the station, but the local shops are neither numerous nor, as Mrs. Hancock, Colonel Fanshawe's widowed sister, sometimes laments, "choice." Butcher, baker, and greengrocer supply the less "choice" comforts of life, but if you want a sweetbread in a hurry, or a bundle of early asparagus, it is idle to expect anything of the sort. A "Court milliner," who lately set up there behind a plate-glass window and some elegant "forms," has a great deal of time on her hands, and a tailor, who professes to have the newest suitings, and to be unrivalled in the matter of liveries, does little more than put an occasional patch in the garments of the male inhabitants, for Heathmoor, in

general, gets its apparel from metropolitan markets, and prefers to be waited on by large and noiseless parlourmaids. In fact, the mercantile quarter forms but an insignificant fraction of Heathmoor residences, the bulk of which consists of admirably comfortable and commodious villas, each standing segregate in its acre or half-acre of garden. All along the well-kept roads—the roads at Heathmoor seem to be washed and dusted, like china, every morning—are situated these residences, so aptly described as desirable, each with its gate, its laurel hedge, and small plot of grass in front, each with its tennis-court or croquet-lawn at back, its tiled roofs, its "tradesmen's entrance," and its crimson rambler aspiring above the dining-room bow-window. The larger houses—those in fact which stand on acre plots—have a stable or garage attached to them, though all are in telephonic communication with the livery stables that are situated on the far side of the railway-bridge, and all are built in accordance with a certain English norm or rule, designed to ensure solid comfort and an absence of draughts. There is none that lacks the electric light, none in which rivers of hot and cold water are not laid on upstairs and downstairs, none that lacks a lavatory situated close to the front door, in which is hung up a convincing and lucid diagram of the system of drainage. But there is no monotony or uniformity in the appearance of these houses; some are of brick, some of rough-cast, and all have a certain mediocre individuality of their own—like the faces of a flock of sheep—which renders them to the observer as various as the high-sounding names that are so clearly printed on their front gates.

Most of these exceedingly comfortable houses, designed for the complete convenience of couples with or without small families, are, as has been said, built on half-acre or acre plots. They are all of modern construction, with a view to the saving of domestic labour, for Heathmoor as a place of residence for well-to-do City men is but of late discovery. But here and there a more spacious specimen can be encountered, and Mrs. Hancock, who found nothing choice in the Heathmoor shops, had some ten years ago, on the death of her husband, bought two of these acre plots, and had built thereon a house of larger rooms, a boudoir, and a stable with coachman's quarters. Since then she had devoted nearly all her income to rendering herself completely and absolutely comfortable. An excellent cook, salaried at sixty pounds a year, a sum which, according to the regular Heathmoor standard, would be considered to be sufficient to pay the wages of a parlourmaid also, largely contributed to her well-being, and a maid, a serious butler with the deportment of a dean, a chauffeur, two housemaids, a kitchen-maid, a gardener, and a daughter were all devoted to the same mission. The daughter occupies the ultimate place in this list, not because Edith was not loving and loved, but because on the whole her contribution to her mother's comfort was materially less than that of any of the others, though perhaps psychically more. Indeed, she shared in rather than subscribed to it, drove with her in her motor, ate of the delicious food, while in the evenings she laid out her own game of patience, without being called upon to advise or condole or congratulate in respect of Mrs. Hancock's. It is

true that the window on Edith's side of the car was put down if her mother required a little more air without being too close to its ingress, and put up if Mrs. Hancock in her seat wished to avoid a draught, but she was by no means enserfed to the ruling spirit that directed and controlled the movements of the other dependents. Naturally she drove and dined with her mother, read her into a comfortable doze after tea, and did all the duties of a daughter, but she had, even when with Mrs. Hancock, an existence and a volition of her own, which the others had not.

Indeed, there was at this present time an event maturing that promised to provide Edith with a completer independence yet, for Mrs. Hancock had for months been encouraging an attachment that was wholly sensible, and, like most sensible things, could not possibly be called romantic. Edward Holroyd, the young man in question, was very well off, being partner in a firm of sound, steady-going brokers in the City, was regularity itself in the persistence with which he caught the 9.6 a.m. train to town every morning, and, as far as could be ascertained, had never, in spite of his twenty-seven years, given any serious attention to a girl until Mrs. Hancock firmly turned his well-featured head in Edith's direction. He lived, furthermore, in a half-acre residence of his own, next door to Mrs. Hancock, and this she reckoned as a solid item among his eligibilities, for Edith would be able to give a great deal of companionship to her mother during the hours when her husband was in the City. Mrs. Hancock did not forget to add—to her own credit side, so to speak—that, since Edith would thus generally lunch with her, and drive

with her afterwards, this would save her daughter something substantial in house-books, and give her the motor-drive she was accustomed to. It is true that her prospective husband had a motor of his own in which it might be supposed that Edith could take the air if so inclined, consequently Mrs. Hancock added another item to her own credit when she reflected that if Edith drove with her there would be effected a saving in Edward's tyre and petrol bills. This was entirely congenial to her mind, for she delighted to make economies for other people as well as herself, if the perfection of her own comfort was not affected thereby.

On this genial morning of early May, ventilated by a breath of south-west wind, and warmed by a summer sun, the dining-room windows of Arundel —the agreeable name of Mrs. Hancock's house— were both open, and she was sitting at a writing-table just within, fixing her plans for the day. She always sat here after breakfast until she had seen her cook, sent orders to her chauffeur, and read the smaller paragraphs in the *Morning Post*. Usually the plans for the day, the marching orders, as she habitually called them, depended completely on the weather. If it was fine she drove in her car from twelve to a quarter-past one, and again, after a salutary digestive pause after lunch, when she engaged with the more solid paragraphs in the *Morning Post*, from three till a quarter to five. This, it must be understood, was the curriculum for the summer ; in the winter radical changes might occur ; and sometimes if the morning was fine, but promised rain later, she would start as early as eleven, and went out—if the weather still held up—for quite a short time in the afternoon.

But she always went out twice, even if occasionally her inclination would have been to stop at home, for Denton, the steady chauffeur, and Lind, the serious butler, would have thought it odd if she did not take two airings. Did she, then, go out when she had a bad cold? No ; but then she never had a bad cold.

To-day, however, being Ascension Day, the marching orders became exceedingly complicated ; and when Lind came in to say that Denton was waiting for her commands, he received the same instructions that had been given him last Ascension Day, but never since. These were not the same as on Sundays and Christmas Days, because on Ascension Day Mrs. Hancock drove in the afternoon.

" Tell Denton I shall want the car at ten minutes to eleven," she said. " No ; you had better say a quarter to—to take me to church. He must be back there at a quarter-past twelve, or, say ten minutes past. I shall drive this afternoon at three. Or——"

Mrs. Hancock pondered a moment, exactly as she had done on last Ascension Day.

" Edith, dear," she said to her daughter, who was winding the clock, " I think we had better lunch to-day at one instead of at half-past. There will not be time to settle down to anything after church. And in that case we had better go out this afternoon at half-past two. And lunch will be at one, Lind. I will see Mrs. Williams now."

She paused again. This was not a usual Ascension Day pause, though connected with it.

" I see there is a holiday on the Stock Exchange,

Edith," she said, "so perhaps Mr. Holroyd will lunch with us. Wait a moment, Lind."

She did not scribble a note, and never had done so, but wrote it very neatly, begging pardon for so short a notice, and hoping that if—a verbal answer was all that was required.

"I will see Mrs. Williams as soon as I get the answer, Lind," she said, "and I will tell you then whether we shall be two at lunch or three."

It was not worth while to "settle" to anything when an interruption would come so soon; and Mrs. Hancock looked quietly and contentedly out over the garden, where Ellis was mowing the tennis-court. The flower-beds below the window dazzled with the excellence of their crimson tulips, and swooned with the sunny fragrance of their wallflowers, and the hedge of espaliered apples that separated the lawn from the kitchen-garden was pink with blooms of promise. The rose-trees were all cut back in storage for their summer flowering; no spike of weed was insolent on the well-kept paths or garden-beds, and no tending that the most exacting gardener's companion could suggest as suitable to the season had been left undone. The same flawless neatness distinguished the dining-room from which Mrs. Hancock looked out. Landseer prints hung quite straight on the paper of damask red. Such chairs as were not in use stood square-shouldered to the walls; the writing-table where she sat was dustlessly furnished with pens, pen-wipers, pencils, sealing-wax, and all stationery appertaining; the maroon curtains were looped back at exactly the same angle, and six inches of green blind showed at the top of each window. Room and garden were as *soignés* as Mrs. Hancock's own abundant hair.

Mrs. Hancock's pass-book had been returned to her from her bankers that morning, and she found it quite pleasant reading, pleasant enough, indeed, to open and read again as she waited for the arrival of the verbal message from next door. Next to devising and procuring all that could be secured of material comforts, the occupation that, perhaps, chiefly administered to her content was that of saving money. This seemed to her an extremely altruistic pleasure, since, if you took a large enough view of it, she was saving for Edith. Thus she would always purchase anything she wanted at the place where it could most cheaply be obtained, provided its quality was in no way inferior, and she never omitted to lay in a replete cellar of coal during the summer months. Anything like waste was abhorrent to her, and, though her ordinary living expenses were excessively high, she could not secure absolute comfort and the flawless appointment of her house at a smaller outlay. She paid high wages to her servants and gladly defrayed their doctors' and dentists' bills, since she wished to make it impossible for them to think of leaving her when once she was satisfied with them, for a change of servants was uncomfortable, and produced days of uneasy suspense before it became certain that the new one would suit her. All such expenses were incurred to procure comfort, and so were necessary, but beyond them she was extremely economical and dearly liked the secure and continued feeling of a big balance at the bank. When that balance grew very large she made a prudent investment, often through Edward Holroyd, and told herself that she was doing it for the sake of Edith.

Before long came a warm acceptance of her hospitality from next door, and, having sent for Mrs. Williams, she added mutton cutlets to the menu, and withdrew the asparagus, as her cook was certain there was not enough for three ; then she got up from her writing-table, since the marching orders were now completed. Her plump and pleasant face was singularly unwrinkled, considering the fifty years that had passed over it, yet it would perhaps have been even more singular if the years had written on it any record of their passage. It is true that she had married, had borne a child, and had lost a husband, but none of these events had marred the placidity of her nature. At the most, they had been but pebbles tossed into and swallowed up below that unruffled surface, breaking it but for a moment with inconsiderable ripples. She had married because she had easily seen the wisdom of becoming the wife of a well-to-do and wholly amiable man instead of continuing to remain the once handsome Miss Julia Fanshawe. Wisdom still continued to be justified of her child, for she enjoyed the whole of her late husband's income, and since her clear four thousand pounds a year was derived from debenture stock and first mortgage bonds, it was not likely that these fruits of prudence would wither or decay on this side of the grave. But she did not ever distress or harass herself with the thought of anything so comfortless as sepulchres, but devoted her time and money to the preservation of her health, and the avoidance of all such worries and anxieties as could possibly disturb the poise and equilibrium of her nervous system. She was slightly inclined to stoutness, and occasionally had rheumatic twinges in the less

important joints, but a month spent annually at Bath sufficed to keep these little ailments in check, while the complete immunity she enjoyed there from all household anxieties, since she lived in a very comfortable hotel, was restorative to a nervous system that already hovered on perfection, and enabled her to take up her home duties again—which, as has been said, consisted in providing comfort for herself—with renewed vigour. This visit to Bath was to take place next week, and for the last ten days she had thought of little else than the question as to whether she would take Denton and her motor-car with her. Last night only she had come to the determination to do so, and consequently there was a great deal to be thought about to-day as to cushions, luggage, and where to lunch, for she was herself going to travel in it.

Edith had finished winding the clock when her mother got up.

"There is still half an hour before we need think of getting ready for church, dear," she said, "and we might go on planning our arrangements for next week. The maps are in the drawing-room, for Denton brought them in last night, but the print is so small that I should be glad if you would get my number two spectacles which I left in my bedroom. They are either on my dressing-table or on the small table by my bed. Filson will find them if you cannot put your hand on them. Oh, look; there are two starlings pecking at the garden-beds. How bold they are with the mowing-machine so close! I hope Ellis will scare them away from the asparagus."

Edith managed to find the number two spectacles without troubling Filson, and devoted her whole

mind, which was as tranquil and lucid as her mother's, to the great question of the journey to Bath. Though the distance was something over a hundred miles, it was clearly better to risk being a little over-tired, and compass the whole in one day, rather than spend the night—perhaps not very comfortably—at some half-way country inn, where it was impossible to be certain about the sheets. After all, if the fatigue was severe a day's rest on arrival at Bath, postponing the treatment till the day after, would set things right. But in that case lunch must either be obtained at Reading, or, better still, they could take it with them in a luncheon-basket, and eat it *en route*. Denton could take his, too, and they would stop for half an hour to eat after Reading, thus dividing the journey into two halves. So far so good.

The question of Filson's journey was more difficult. If the day was fine she could, of course, travel outside with Denton, but if it was wet she would have to come inside—a less ideal arrangement with regard to knees. In that case also Lind would have to go up to town with the heavy luggage, and see it firmly bestowed in the Bath express at Paddington. At this point Edith triumphantly vindicated the superiority of two heads over one, and suggested that Filson should go up to town with the heavy luggage, and catch the 2.30 express (was it not?) at Paddington, thus arriving at Bath before them. Indeed, she would have time almost to unpack before they came.

The 2.30 train was verified, and thereafter all was clear. Lind would escort Filson and the heavy luggage to the station, and since Mrs. Williams would be putting up lunches anyhow, Filson could

take hers as well. . . . But it was time to get ready for church, and the question of cushions and cloaks for so long a drive which might be partly cold and partly warm must wait. But certainly Denton would have to come in either after church or in the evening, for the route, which appeared to lie straight down the Bath road, had not been tackled at all yet.

Mrs. Hancock's religious convictions and practices, which Edith entirely shared with her, were as comfortable as her domestic arrangements, but simpler, and they did not occupy her mind for so many hours daily. It must be supposed that she recognized the Christian virtue of charity, for otherwise she would not, in the course of the year, have knitted so large a quantity of thick scarves, made from a cheap but reliable wool, or have sent them to the wife of her parish clergyman for distribution among the needy. She worked steadily at them after the short doze which followed tea, while Edith read aloud to her, but apart from this and the half-crowns which she so regularly put into the offertory-plate, the consideration of the poor and needy did not practically concern her, though she much disliked seeing tramps and beggars on the road. For the rest, a quiet thankfulness, except when she had rheumatism, glowed mildly in her soul for all the blessings of this life which she so abundantly enjoyed, and even when she had rheumatism she was never vehement against Providence. She was quite certain, indeed, that Providence took the greatest care of her, and she followed that example by taking the greatest care of herself, feeling it a duty to do so. For these attentions she returned thanks every morning and

evening in her bedroom, and in church on Sunday morning, and also frequently in the evening, if fine. When rheumatism troubled her she added a petition on the subject and went to Bath. Never since her earliest days had she felt the slightest doubts with regard to the religion that was hers, and dogma she swallowed whole, like a pill. Her father had been a Canon of Salisbury, and in the fourth and least-used sitting-room in the house, where smoking was permitted if gentlemen were staying with her, was a glass-fronted bookcase in which were four volumes of his somewhat controversial sermons. These she sometimes read to herself on wet Sunday evenings, if Edith chanced to have a sore throat. Her evening doze usually succeeded this study. But to say that the principles of a Christian life were alien to her would be libellous, since, though neither devout nor ascetic, she was kind, especially when it involved no self-sacrifice, she was truthful, she was a complete stranger to envy, slander, or malice, and was quite unvexed by any doubts concerning the wisdom and benevolence of the Providence in which she trusted as firmly as she trusted in aspirin and Bath for her rheumatism.

At the church in which she was so regular an attendant, she found both doctrine and ritual completely to her mind, even as it was to the mind of the comfortable and prosperous inhabitants of Heathmoor generally. No litany ever lifted up its lamentable petitions there, the hymns were always of a bright and jovial order, unless, as in Lent, brightness was liturgically impossible, and the vicar even then made a habit of preaching delightfully short and encouraging sermons about

the Christian duty of appreciating all that was agreeable in life, and told his congregation that it was far more important to face the future with a cheerful heart than to turn a regretful eye towards the sins and omissions of the past. To this advice Mrs. Hancock found it both her pleasure and her duty to conform, and, indeed, with her excellent health, her four thousand pounds a year, and her household of admirable servants, it was not difficult to face the future with smiling equanimity. And though, again, it would have been libellous to call her pharisaical, for she was not the least complacent in her estimate of herself, she would have experienced considerable difficulty in making any sort of catalogue of her misdoings. Besides, as Mr. Martin distinctly told them, it was mere morbidity to dwell among the broken promises of the past. "Far better, dear friends, to be up and doing in the glorious sunlight of a new day. Sufficient, may we not truly say, to the day is the good thereof. Let that be our motto for the week. And now."

And the refreshed and convinced congregation poured thankful half-crowns into the velvet collecting pouches, and themselves into the glorious sunlight.

Edward Holroyd, from the bow-window of his dining-room next door—like most of the inhabitants of Heathmoor he habitually sat in his dining-room after breakfast when not leaving for the City by the 9.6 a.m. train—saw the Hancocks' car glide churchwards at ten minutes to eleven, and then proceeded to his drawing-room to practise on his piano with slightly agitated hands. The agitation was partly due to the extraordinary

number of accidentals which Chopin chose to put into the Eleventh Etude, partly to a more intimate cause, connected with the invitation he had just accepted. For some months now—in fact, ever since his twenty-seventh birthday—he had made up his mind that it was time to get married, and had held himself in a position of almost pathetic eagerness—like a man crouching for the sprint, waiting the signal of the pistol—to fall in love. But either the pre-ordained maiden or some psychical defect in himself had been lacking, and he had long been wondering if there was to be any pistol at all. If not, it was idle to maintain himself in the tense, crouching strain. But he had no doubts whatever that he wished to be married, and that Mrs. Hancock—when he allowed himself for a moment to face a slightly embarrassing question—wished him to be married, too. She constantly turned his head in one particular direction, and that direction showed him, in house-agents' phrase, a very pleasing prospect, which, without complacency, he believed smiled on him with an open and even affectionate regard. But he wondered at himself for not being of a livelier eagerness in emotional matters, for he brought to the vocations and avocations of his busy and cheerful life a fund of enthusiasm which was of more than normal intensity. Like the majority of the males of Heathmoor, he rounded off days of strenuous work in the City with strenuous amusements, and with croquet in summer and bridge and piano-playing in the winter, filled up to the brim the hours between the arrival of the evening train and bedtime. But the failure of the inevitable and unique She to put in an appearance and bewitch the eyes

and the heart which were so eager to be spell-bound was disconcerting. For years he had looked for her, for years he had missed her, and since his twenty-seventh birthday he had begun to determine to do without her. He accepted the limitations, namely, his own inability to fall in love, for which he could not devise a cure, and was prepared to close gratefully with so pleasant and attractive an arrangement as he believed to be open to him. He liked and admired Edith, her firm and comely face, her serene content, her quiet capable ways. She was as fond of croquet and bridge as himself, and—this was a larger testimonial than he knew—really enjoyed his piano-playing. And if the lightnings and thunders of romance roused no reverberating glories in his heart, it must be remembered that romance is a shy rare bird, coming not to nest under every eave, and that there would be a very sensible diminution in marriage fees if every man delayed matrimony until the blinding ecstatic light fell upon his enraptured eyes.

It is clear "what was the matter," in medical phrase, with this handsome and lively young man. At heart he was an idealist, but one ready to capitulate, to surrender to beleaguering common sense. He was ready to sacrifice his dreams, a somewhat serious offence in a world where true dreamers are so rare. By nature he was a true dreamer, but accumulating wealth and the dense comfort of life at Heathmoor had done much to rouse him, though in music he still saw the fiery fabric, unsubstantial and receding. In performance he was quite execrable, in imagination of the highest calibre. Through all his patient and heavy

strumming he heard the singing of the immortal bird, and even his reputation as a piano-player in the drawing-rooms of Heathmoor had not made him lose his profound appreciation of his own incompetence. But in music alone was he worthy any more of the title of a dreamer ; to-day he stood pen in hand ready to sign the greatest capitulation to common sense that a man is ever called upon to make, for he was ready to give up the image of the invisible conjectured She that stood faintly glimmering in the inmost chamber of his heart and throw it open for a charming enemy to enter.

It was not long before he gave up his attempts on the piano, for this invitation to lunch next door had caused him to take a definite resolution which upset all steadiness and concentration, and, lighting a pipe, he strolled out into his garden. He had not room there for a full-sized croquet lawn, and had contented himself with three or four hoops of ultra-championship narrowness, through which, with the fervour of the true artist, he was accustomed to practise various awkward hazards. But here, again, as by the piano, desire failed, and, with an extinguished pipe, he sat down on a garden-seat, and experienced a sharp attack of spurious middle-age, such as is incidental to youth, regretting, as youth does, the advent of the middle-age, which in reality is yet far distant. He had completely made up his mind to propose to Edith that day, believing, without coxcombry, that he would be accepted, believing also that the future thus held for him many years of health and happiness, with the addition, no slight one, of a charming and inalienable companion whom he liked and

admired. Yet something, the potentiality of the fire which had never yet been lit in him, caused him an infinite and secret regret for the step which was now as good as taken. He longed for something he had never experienced, for something of which he had no real conception, but of which he felt himself capable, for, as the flint owns fire in its heart, but must wait to be struck, he felt that his true destiny was not to be but a stone to mend a road, or, at the best, to be mortared into a house-wall, with all his fiery seed slumbering within him. Yet . . . what if there was no fire there at all? He had long held himself ready, aching, you might say, for the blow that should evoke it, and none had struck him into blaze.

It was not surprising that the approaching motor-drive to Bath loomed conversationally large at lunch, and Edward proved weighty in debate. He had a sharp, decisive habit in social affairs ; his small change of talk was bright and fresh from the mint, and seemed a faithful index to his keen face and wiry, assertive hair.

" Quite right not to break the journey, Mrs. Hancock," he said. " Most country hotels consist of feather-beds, fish with brown sauce, and windows over a stable-yard. But if you do it in one journey, get most of it over before lunch. I should start by ten at the latest."

Mrs. Hancock consulted a railway time-table.

" Then Filson will have to be finished with her packing at half-past nine," she said. " The heavy luggage must go to the station in the car before we start."

" Have it sent in a cab afterwards," suggested Holroyd.

Mrs. Hancock pondered over this.

"I don't think I should like that, should I, Edith?" she said. "I should prefer to see it actually leave the house. Or can I trust Lind and Filson? Edith dear, remember to remind me to take the patience cards in my small bag. There is room to lay out a patience on the folding-table in the car, and it will help to pass the time."

"And have you got footstools?" asked Edward.

Over Mrs. Hancock's face there spread a smile like the coming of dawn. Here was a comfort that had never occurred to her.

"*What* a good idea!" she said. "I have often felt a little strained and uncomfortable in the knees when motoring for more than an hour or two. Very likely it was just the want of a footstool. Remind me to take out my bedroom footstool in the car this afternoon, Edith, to see if it is the right height. You *are* helpful, Mr. Holroyd. I never thought of a footstool."

His next half-dozen suggestions, however, showed that Mrs. Hancock had thought of a good deal already, including a Thermos flask for coffee, a contour map of the country, and a stylograph pen in case she found that she had left anything behind. and wanted to write a postcard *en route*. Post-cards she always carried in a green morocco writing-case.

"Filson must take a postcard, too," she said, "ready directed to Lind, in case anything goes wrong with the luggage. That is a good idea. She will be very comfortable, do you not think, Mr. Holroyd, in a nice third-class compartment for ladies only. I am often tempted to go third-class myself, when I see how cheap and comfort-able it is."

Edward felt quite certain that this was a temptation to which Mrs. Hancock had never yielded, and lunch proceeded in silence for a few moments. Then, since nobody was able to make any further suggestion whatever which could lead to additional comfort or security on this momentous journey, Mrs. Hancock allowed herself to be drawn into other topics, still not unconnected with Bath, such as the efficacy of the waters, and the steepness of the hills which surrounded it, which, however, with Denton's careful driving and the new brakes she had had fitted to her car, presented no unmanning terrors.

"I shall be there," she said, "exactly four weeks, so as to get back early in June. Bath is very hot in the summer, but I do not mind that, and the hotel rates are more reasonable then. After that we shall be occupied, for my niece, Elizabeth Fanshawe, will arrive almost as soon as I return. She will be with me till she goes back to India to her father in October."

Out of the depths of half-forgotten memories an image, quite vague and insignificant, broke the surface of Holroyd's mind.

"Was she not with you two years ago?" he asked. "A tall, dark girl with black hair."

"Fancy your remembering her! I so envy a good memory. Edith, dear, remind me to get the piano tuned. I will write from Bath. Elizabeth is for ever at the piano now, so my brother tells me. She will enjoy hearing you play, Mr. Holroyd. Well, if everybody has finished, I am sure you will like to have a cigarette in the garden. Edith will take you out and show you the tulips."

It must not be supposed that this arrangement

was to be dignified into the name of manœuvre on Mrs. Hancock's part, except in so far that after lunch she liked to skim the larger paragraphs of the *Morning Post*, comfortably reclining on the sofa in her private sitting-room. She was not a person of subtle perceptions, and it had certainly never occurred to her that Holroyd had come to lunch that day with his purpose formed ; she only wanted to read the *Morning Post*, and, as usual, to throw him and Edith together. As for Edith, she had been quite prepared a dozen times during this last month to listen with satisfaction to his declaration, and to give him an amiable affirmative on the earliest possible occasion. Each time that her mother arranged some similar little *tête-à-tête* for them she felt a slight but pleasurable tremor of excitement, but was never in the least cast down when it proved that her anticipations were premature. She was perfectly aware of her mother's approval, and it only remained to give voice to her own. She had long ago made up her mind that she would sooner marry than remain single, and she had never dreamed or desired that it should be any other man than this who should conduct her to the goal of her wishes. That she was in any degree in love with him—if the phrase connotes anything luminous or tumultuous—it would be idle to assert ; but equally idle would it be to deny that, according to the manner of her aspirations, he seemed to her an ideal husband. For ten adolescent years—for she was now twenty-four—she had lived in the stifling and soul-quelling comfort of her mother's house, and it would have been strange if the dead calm and propriety of her surroundings had not bred in her a corresponding

immobility of the emotions, for there is something chameleon-like in the spirit of every girl not powerfully vitalized ; it assimilates itself to its surroundings, and custom and usage limn the hues, which at first are superficial and evanescent, into stains of permanent colour. Passion and deep feeling, so far from entering into Edith herself, had never even exhibited themselves in the confines of her horizons ; she had neither experienced them nor seen others in their grip. But she thought—indeed, she was certain—that she would like to be mistress in the house where Edward Holroyd was master. She felt sure she could make herself and him very comfortable.

She went out, hatless like him, into the warm bath of sun and south-west wind, and they passed side by side up the weedless garden-path. All Nature, bees and bright-eyed birds and budding flowers, was busy with the great festival of spring and mating-time ; nothing was barren but the salted weedless path, so carefully defertilized. The tulips were a brave show, and in their deep bed below the paling a border of wallflowers spun a web of warm, ineffable fragrance. Ellis, returned from his midday hour, was still engaged with the clicking mowing-machine on the velvet-napped lawn, and they went on farther till the gravel of the paths of the flower-garden was exchanged for the cinders of the kitchen patch, and the hedge of espaliers hid them from the house. Then he stopped, and a moment afterwards she also, smoothing into place a braid of her bright brown hair. And without agitation came the question, without agitation the reply. Indeed, there was nothing for two sensible young people to be

agitated about. Each was fond of the other, neither had seen any one else more desirable, and over the hearts of each lay thick the cobwebs of comfort and motor-cars and prosperous affairs and unimpassioned content. Only as he spoke he felt some vague soul-eclipse, some dispersal of a dream.

Then he drew her towards him and kissed her, and for one moment below the cobwebs in her heart something stirred, ever so faintly, ever so remotely, connected with the slight roughness of his close-shaven face, with the faint scent of soap, of cigarette. But it did not embarrass her.

They stood there for a moment looking into each other's faces, as if expecting something new, something revealed.

"Shall we tell your mother now?" he asked.

Still she looked at him; he was not quite the same as he had been before.

"Oh, in a minute or two," she said.

Suddenly he felt that he had to stir himself somehow into greater tenderness, greater—— But he felt disappointed; it had all been exactly as he had imagined.

"I am very happy," he said. "I have thought about this moment so much, Edith."

It was the first time he had used her name.

"Edward!" she said, looking straight at him. "Edward! No, I don't think I shall call you Edward. I must have a name of my own for you."

At the moment the sound of a gong from within the house droned along the garden.

"The motor is round," she said.

This time it was he who delayed, though without passion.

"Your mother will not mind waiting a minute," he said.

"No. What else have you to say to me?"

"Everything ; nothing."

She laughed.

"There is not time for the one," she said, "and no time is required for the other. Besides, all the time that there is is ours now."

In all her life she had never phrased a sentence so neat, so nearly epigrammatic. Its briskness was the fruit of the stimulus that had come to her.

They delayed no further, but went back to the house, where Mrs. Hancock was already waiting. She did not attempt to appear surprised at their news, but, placidly delighted at it, kissed them both, and took it for granted that Edward would come in to dine with them that evening. Then, since there was no use in vain repetitions, she reverted to the topic which had to be considered at once.

"Let me see," she said. "I think the motor is round, and Filson has brought down the footstool from my bedroom to see if it is the right height. A quarter to eight, then, dear Edward, to-night ; we shall be quite alone, and if you will come in half an hour sooner I have no doubt that you will find my darling dressed and waiting to talk to you. Fancy what a lot you will have to say to each other now ! And then, after dinner, as you are drinking your glass of port, I shall claim you for a little conversation, while we send Edith to wait in the drawing-room. Oh, I see you have brought the footstool from the spare room as well, Filson. That *was* well thought of, as they are of different heights, and one might suit if the other did not.

Let me get in, and see which suits me best. . . . Now try them one on top of the other, Filson. Well, really I think that is the most comfortable of all. Edith, dear, are you ready? And I have brought down my patience cards, and if I put them into the pocket under the window at once I can dismiss them from my mind. There! A quarter-past seven, then, dear Edward, for a chat before dinner. Yes, leave the footstools in the car, Filson, and we will measure the height when I come back."

Denton was standing with the door in his hand, waiting for orders.

"You might take us first to Slough, Denton," she said, "so that we shall see what the road is like before we join the Bath road next week, and then we can go through the Beeches. We are ten minutes late in starting, but if we are a little late for tea it won't matter for once in a way. Tell Mrs. Williams, Lind, that we may be ten minutes late for tea."

Mrs. Hancock habitually wore a perfectly natural and amiable smile on her pleasant face, except when her rheumatism gave her an exceptional twinge, or, more exceptionally yet, Mrs. Williams was not quite up to the mark. To-day the discovery of the footstools and Edith's engagement seemed to her to be touching examples of the care of Providence, and she was beamingly conscious of the variety of pleasant objects and topics in the world. She laid her hand in Edith's as the car started.

"And now I want to hear all—all about it, darling," she said. "Oh, look, there are two magpies! Is not that lucky? And will you let

your window quite down, dear? It is so warm and pleasant this afternoon. I will have mine just half-way up. There! That is nice! And now I want to hear all about it."

Edith returned the affectionate pressure of her mother's hand.

"It was all so sudden, mother," she said, "and yet I was not at all startled. He—Edward stopped when we reached the kitchen-garden, and so I stopped, too. And, without any speeches, he just asked me, and I said 'Yes' at once, as I had always meant to. And then he said he was very happy, and kissed me."

Mrs. Hancock thought that Denton was driving a little too fast, as if he meant to make up the lost ten minutes, but she checked herself from calling down the tube to him.

"My dearest!" she said. "You will never forget the first kiss given you by the man who loves you. Oh, what a jolt!"

The jolt decided her, and she called to Denton not to go quite so fast. Then she pressed Edith's hand again.

"Tell me more, dear," she said. "Had you expected it at all?"

Edith looked at her with complete candour.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "And that is why it seemed so natural when it came."

The faintest flush glowed on her face.

"But I never liked him so much before as when he kissed me," she said. "It did not make me feel at all awkward. I used to think that if such a thing ever happened to me I should not know which way to look. But it all seemed quite natural. Our tastes agree in so many things, too—music

and croquet and so on. That is a good thing, is it not?"

Mrs. Hancock beamed again.

"My dear, of course," she said. "Community of taste is half the"—battle, she was going to say—"half the strength and joy of marriage. Oh, here we are in Slough already. Turn to the right, Denton, and go through Burnham Beeches. Yes, what games of croquet you will have, and what music. I will get a gate made in the paling between his garden and ours, so that there will be no need to go round by the front door and ring the bell. I dare say Ellis could do it, or even if I had to get a carpenter it would be but a trifle anyhow, and I certainly shall not permit Edward to pay half of it, however much he may insist. Bless you, my darling! I feel so happy and contented about it. Look, there is a Great Western express. What a pace they go!"

Edith usually gave excellent attention to the various bright objects which continually caught and pleased her mother's eye. But to-day she wandered, or rather, did not wander.

"It was wonderful," she said. "I hadn't guessed."

But her mother had other things as well to think about.

"Edward was quite right," she said. "A footstool, or rather one on top of another, makes all the difference. I shall order a very thick one from the stores, sending the height I require. And I think I must give a little dinner-party before I go to Bath, dear, just to tell a few friends our news. I wish the asparagus was a little more forward. How lovely the beeches are! And look

at those sweet little birds! Are they thrushes? I wonder, or what? And what do you guess they are saying to each other? I will ask Mr. Beaumont, I think, and the Martins and Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs. It will not do to have it on Wednesday if we start early on Thursday, as we shall find plenty of little jobs on the last evening, and it will be wise to get to bed early if we are to motor all next day. It must be Tuesday. Perhaps the asparagus will have come popping up, if the hot weather holds. Darling, I cannot tell you how pleased I am! And what an excitement for your cousin Elizabeth. Fancy if she was a bridesmaid before she went back to India! What a lot she would have to tell to Uncle Robert! We shall soon have to begin to think when it is to be."

Mrs. Hancock said no more on this subject, for the fact was that she had not made up her mind when she wished the marriage to take place. She had vaguely contemplated going to Egypt with her daughter next winter, and she could not offhand balance the disadvantages of going alone (in case she settled that Edith should be married first), with the advantage of saving the expenses of taking her. Then a brilliant possibility struck her. Edward might be induced to come too, in which case the marriage must certainly take place first. Since then he would, of course, pay for Edith. But all this required consideration.

Indeed, there were many things which would need a great deal of careful thought. Chief among them, already blotting out the beauty of the beeches, was the whole question of settlements. Edith would naturally inherit the whole of her

mother's money at her death (an event to be contemplated with only the most distant recognition), and Mrs. Hancock had no intention of making serious inroads into her income, which, handsome as it was, did not more than provide her with everything she wanted, and enable her to put by a nice round sum of money every year. This she was so much accustomed to do that it was unreasonable to expect her at her age to break so prudent and long-established a habit. But all this must depend to some extent on Edward's attitude and expectations. She had no doubt that, for his part, he would do all that was generous, which would obviate the necessity of being very open-handed herself. Living next door, Edith would be able to come in to lunch every day when he was in the City, and enjoy her motor-drive, as usual, without any expense. The croquet-lawn, too, would be quite at Edward's disposal. . . . Practically, she was presenting the young couple with a motor-car, a lunch daily, and a croquet-lawn, kept in excellent order by Ellis, straight away. Then there were wedding presents to be thought of, which would be a great expense ; and Elizabeth was going to spend four months at least with her—an additional drain. . . . Mrs. Hancock began to feel quite worried and pressed for money, as she was accustomed to do when, having made some considerable investment, she found she had not more than two or three hundred pounds lying at her bank.

Edward arrived, as had been already agreed, half an hour before dinner, and found Edith, already dressed, waiting for a lover's talk in the drawing-room. Lind had seen that the housemaids

had completed the evening toilet of the room, and strict injunctions had been issued that the two were not to be disturbed. Edward kissed her again as soon as they were left alone, but after that no interruption, however sudden, would have surprised a fiery scene. Both were placid, content, happy, undisturbed by strong emotion, and unembarrassed by its absence. But though as yet no surface signs gave indication, the evenly hung balance had begun to quiver. Once more his kiss woke in her a tremor of dim agitation, while inwardly he wondered, though as yet unembarrassed, at his own want of emotion. Not for a moment did he regret what he had done ; he was happy in the event of the day, but only a little surprised, a little scornful of himself for finding that he felt so precisely as he had anticipated that he would feel. He had not expected to be inflamed with sudden rapture, and was not. Dimly he saw that the adventure to which they were committed promised more to her than it did to him, and he was ashamed of that. Yet to him it had its definite promise. This charming girl whom he liked, whom he admired, with whom he was in sympathy, had consented to share his life with him. To no one would he have so willingly offered himself as to her who had so willingly accepted him. His horizon, such as it was, was filled with her. . . . Only he wondered, and that but vaguely, what lay over that horizon's rim. But he found no difficulty in framing his lips to the sense and nonsense of lover's talk.

"I have been too happy all the afternoon to do anything," he said. "I have just sat and strolled and thought and waited."

He possessed himself of her hand, and told himself how capable it was, yet how soft, how pretty. Hitherto he had not give many thoughts to hands ; now he realized that this particular one concerned him. He admired it ; it was strong and fine.

"Ah, I am having a bad influence upon you already," said she, "if I make you idle."

Suddenly it appeared to him a wonderful and beautiful thing that he and a charming girl should be saying these intimate things, and his response was almost eager.

"I was only idle from happiness," he said. "Isn't it all wonderful? Would you have had me go to tea with some foolish people whom I did not want to see?"

"I make you misanthropic as well. But I'm not ashamed if I make you happy."

Something stirred within her, some new beating pulse. She came a little closer to him.

"You looked so nice, Edward," she said, "this afternoon, when you stopped and spoke. But I couldn't bear your tie. I shall knit you one the same shade of brown as your eyes. I will do it at Bath."

"It is a great nuisance your going to Bath," he said. "Must you really go? I want you here. But the tie will be lovely."

"Oh, conceit," she said, "after I have told you it is to be the colour of your eyes."

"I forgot that. Aren't you being rather malicious?"

He looked up from her hand to her face. Never before had he noticed how bright and abundant was her hair, how delicate the line of black eyebrow. He corrected himself.

"Malicious, did I say?" he asked. "I meant —I meant delicious. And, talking of eyes, I must give you a turquoise engagement ring for the day, and a sapphire one for the evening."

"What has that to do with eyes?" she asked.

"Everything. Yours are light blue in the sunlight, and dark blue at night."

"I feel as if I ought to apologize. But I don't think I shall; it wasn't my fault."

"I don't insist," said he. "But I insist on knowing one thing. When?"

"When? What do you mean?" she asked.

"Look me in the face, and say you don't know."

Edith laughed—a happy little quiver of a laugh that she had never heard yet.

"I could if I liked," she said. "But I don't choose to. If you mean——"

"That is exactly what I mean."

"How can you know before I have said it?" she asked.

"I can. Do say what I mean."

Again she laughed.

"When shall we be married was what you meant."

She looked extremely pretty and rather shy. He had never noticed before how fine was her mouth, how fine and fair the curve of her upper lip.

"Yes, sapphire and turquoise," he said. His lips said it, his brain said it.

The sonorous tones of the Chinese gong, manipulated with so cunning a crescendo and diminuendo by Lind, boomed through the house. Immediately afterwards Mrs. Hancock's tread, noticeably heavy, was heard on the stairs. She

hummed some little nameless ditty in warning. Edith got up.

"Dinner already?" she said.

Edward, perhaps, was not quite so much surprised at the swiftness of the passage of this half-hour.

"Before you have answered my question," he said as the door opened.

CHAPTER IV

COMFORTABLE PLANS

HAD the Day of Judgment or any other devastating crisis been fixed for the morrow, that would not have delayed Mrs. Hancock's retirement to her bedroom not later than eleven the night before. Sometimes, and not rarely, she went upstairs at half-past ten in order to get a good night before the fatigues of the next day, whatever they might happen to be, but in no case, unless by chance she went to the theatre in town, was she later than eleven. She did not always go to bed immediately on arrival in her room ; frequently, after she had played her invariable game of patience, while Filson brushed her hair, she read a book, since, as she so often lamented, she had so little time for reading during the day ; sometimes she sat in front of her fire making further plans for her comfort.

To-night plans occupied her for a considerable time, and though they directly concerned Edith, they might still be correctly classified as bearing on her own comfort. She had literally enjoyed half an hour's conversation with Edward after dinner ; this had been of a highly satisfactory character, for she had ascertained that he was making a really substantial income, and that he had investments, all of a sound character, which

already amounted to over thirty thousand pounds. This, in the event of his death—to which apparently he did not mind alluding at all—he was prepared to settle on his wife. The house next door was freehold property of his, and, though he had contemplated selling that and purchasing one that was more of the size to which Edith was accustomed, he seemed perfectly ready to fall in with Mrs. Hancock's clearly expressed wish that he should remain where he was, for the wrench of parting with Edith at all was only tolerable to her if the parting was not to be more than a few yards in breadth. The question of the garden-gate in the paling did not, however, fill him with any intense enthusiasm, and she, after making it quite clear that he was not expected to pay for it, let the subject drop. But she intended to give Ellis the necessary instructions all the same, for she was quite sure he would like it when it was done. Furthermore, he had not expressed the least curiosity as regards what allowance or dowry she was intending to give Edith, which showed a very proper confidence. He could not, in fact, have behaved with greater delicacy, and yet that delicacy had put Mrs. Hancock, so to speak, rather in a hole. She had to determine, by the light of her own generosity alone, what she was prepared to do.

It was this point that now occupied her, after she had written a note to the stores, ordering a footstool nine inches high, covered in a dark red shade of russia leather. . . . So *that* was off her mind. Edward had given quite a warm welcome to the scheme of the Egyptian expedition, and had expressed his readiness to take no holiday this summer, but have his vacation then. In this

case, marriage in November, a month's honeymoon with his bride, and a reunion with Mrs. Hancock at Cairo, was an ideal arrangement. All this kindled Mrs. Hancock's sense of generosity, for it would relieve her of the expense of Edith on the Egyptian tour, and in the first glow of her gratification, she proposed to herself to settle on Edith a sum that should produce four hundred pounds a year. She was almost surprised at herself for this unhesitating open-handedness, and sat down to consider just what it meant.

Four hundred a year represented a capital of over ten thousand pounds. That seemed a great deal of money to put without restriction into the hands of a girl who hitherto had been accustomed to control only an allowance for dress and pocket-money paid quarterly. It would be much more prudent, and indeed kinder, to give her, at first anyhow, till by experience in household management, she became accustomed to deal with larger sums, a quarterly allowance as before. Four hundred a year was more than double what she had been accustomed to, and no doubt Edward, who was clearly the soul of generosity, would give her no less. Edith would then be mistress, for her own private expenses alone, of no less than eight hundred a year. This was colossal affluence ; enough, carefully used, for the upbringing and support of an entire family. She could never spend eight hundred a year, and there was no need for her to save, since she was the wife of a well-to-do husband, and heiress to a considerable fortune. So much money would but be a burden to her. If her mother allowed her two hundred a year, that added to what Edward would no doubt

insist on giving her—Mrs. Hancock had settled that he would certainly give as much as she had originally thought of giving—would make her a more than ample allowance.

Her thoughts went back for a moment to the note to the stores which lay on the table. Certainly a footstool made a motor-drive much more comfortable, and, since Edith was going to accompany her to Bath, her mother could not bear the thought that she should lack the comforts she gave herself. She would order two footstools. . . . Without a moment's hesitation she opened the letter and made the necessary alteration. There! That was done. How pleased Edith would be.

She returned to the question of the allowance, viewing it, as it were, from a rather greater distance. She hoped, she prayed that Edith would have children, who must certainly adore their granny. Their granny would certainly adore them, and it would be nothing less than a joy to her to give each of them, say, a hundred pounds every birthday, to be prudently invested for them, so that when they came of age they would have tidy little fortunes of their own. She glowed with pleasure when she thought of that. Children's education was a great expense, and it would be so nice for Edward to know that, as each child of his came of age, he would have waiting for him quite a little income of his own; or, capitalized, such a sum would start the boys in life, and provide quite a dowry for the daughters. At compound interest money doubled itself in no time; they would all be young men and women of independent means. Perhaps Edith would have five or six children, and, though Mrs. Hancock's muni-

ficence would then be costing her six hundred a year—or interest on fifteen thousand pounds—she felt that it would be the greatest delight to pinch herself to make ends meet for the sake of being such a fairy-granny. But if she was paying Edith two hundred a year all the time the very queen of the fairy-grannies would scarcely be able to afford all this. And she felt quite sure that Edith would choose to have her children provided for rather than herself, for she had the most unselfish of natures.

Hitherto Edith had received a hundred and fifty a year for dress and travelling expenses when she went alone. She had done very well on that, and was always neat and tidy ; now without doubt her husband would pay all her travelling expenses, since they would always travel together. Even if she continued to give Edith a hundred and fifty pounds a year, that, with her travelling expenses paid by her husband, and an allowance—as before —of four hundred a year from him, would be far more than she could possibly require. Besides, her mother had already settled to provide lunch for her every day while Edward was in town, and a motor-drive afterwards, while to keep the croquet-lawn at such a pitch of perfection as so fine a player as Edward would expect—and she was determined he should find—would mean very likely another gardener, or, at any rate, a man to come in once or twice a week to help Ellis. Then there was the trousseau to be thought of, which Mrs. Hancock was invincibly determined to provide herself, and that would cost more than the whole of Edith's allowance for the year. Certainly, with this necessary visit to Bath, and the winter in

Egypt which she had promised Edward she would manage, and with the expense of having Elizabeth in the house all the summer she herself would be very poor indeed for the next year. It seemed really unreasonable that for these twelve months she should give Edith any allowance at all. And by that time, please God, there might be a little grandchild to begin providing for. Evidently she would have to be very careful and saving, but the thought of those for whom she would be stinting herself made such sacrifice a work of joy and pleasure. But for a moment she looked at the note to the stores again, wondering whether it would not be possible to put one footstool between them to be shared by both. That red leather was very expensive.

Then there were wedding presents to be thought of, and, though she was determined to give Edith her whole trousseau, she meant to behave lavishly in this respect, and, glowing with the prospective delight of giving, she opened the Bramah-locked jewel safe which was let into her bedroom wall. She quite longed to clasp round Edith's neck the four fine rows of pearls which had come to her from her late husband, but this was impossible, since she was convinced they were heirlooms, and must remain in her possession till her death. There was a diamond tiara, which, it was true, was her own property, but this was far too matronly an ornament for a young bride ; diamond tiaras also were out of place in Heathmoor, and she had not once worn it herself in the ten years that she had lived here ; it was no use giving dear Edith jewels that she would but lock up in her safe. Then there was an emerald necklace of admirable stones,

but it was old-fashioned, and green never suited Edith. She disliked green ; she would not wear it. But pink was her favourite colour, and here was the very thing, a dog-collar of beautiful coral with a pearl clasp. How often had Edith admired it ! How often had her mother thought of giving it her ! There was a charming moonstone brooch, too, set in dear little turquoises. The blue and the pink would go deliciously together. As a matter of fact the turquoises were rather green, too.

But it was late ; time had flown over those liberal schemes. She locked up the coral necklace and the moonstone brooch in a drawer by themselves—Edith's drawer she instantly christened it—said her prayers with an overflowing heart and went to bed. Just before she fell asleep she made up her mind to order new morocco boxes lined with dark-blue velvet, with Edith's new initials in gilt upon them, to hold these wedding-gifts. Then there was Edward ; she must give him something he would use and take pleasure in ; there was no sense in giving presents which were not useful. . . . Suddenly an excellent idea struck her. How pleased he would be at her remembering the want he had expressed the other day—a want that was only one item out of the gift she contemplated. She would give him a whole set, and he might keep them in her garden-house since he would use them here. It would be necessary to write another letter to the stores. What a lot of things there were to think about and provide when young people were going to be married !

The little party which Mrs. Hancock invited to receive officially the news of Edith's engagement were all " delighted to be able to accept," even

though the notice was so short. Dinner-giving at Heathmoor, though during the summer croquet and lawn-tennis parties, with iced coffee and caviare sandwiches, were of almost daily occurrence—indeed, sometimes they clashed—was chiefly confined to Saturday evening, when no sense of early trains on the morrow made writing on the wall to check conviviality. Mrs. Hancock knew that quite well, though in her notes to her guests she had said, "if by any chance you happen to be disengaged on Tuesday," and would have been much surprised if any previous engagement had forced any one to be obliged to decline. Personally, she would have liked to get together a somewhat larger gathering, for Ellis said there was no doubt about a sufficiency of asparagus, but Lind invariably set his hatchet-like face against a party of more than eight, which he considered a sufficiently festive number. In the earlier years of Lind's iron rule Mrs. Hancock had sometimes invited a larger party, but on these occasions the service had been so slow, the wine so sparingly administered, and Lind's demeanour, if she remonstrated next morning, so frozen and fatalistic, so full of scarcely veiled threats about his not giving satisfaction, that by degrees he had schooled her into submission, and she was beginning to consider that eight was the pleasantest number of guests, and a quarter-to the most suitable hour, which also was Lind's choice. So on this occasion there were the engaged couple and herself, the clergyman, Mr. Martin, and his wife, an eminent and solid solicitor, Mr. Dobbs with Mrs. Dobbs, and Mr. Beaumont, one of the few men in Heathmoor who was not actively engaged all day in making money, partly accounted

for by the fact that he had a great deal already, partly that he would have certainly lost it instead. Idle, however, he was not, for he was an entomologist of fanatical activity. He spent most summer evenings in spreading intoxicating mixtures of beer and sugar on tree-trunks to stupefy unwary lepidoptera, most of the night in visiting these banquets with a lantern, and taking into custody his inebriated guests, and the entire day in beating copses for caterpillars, in running over noonday heaths with a green butterfly net, and in killing and setting the trophies of his chase. For a year or two Mrs. Hancock had spread vague snares about him for Edith's sake, feigning an unfounded interest in the crawlings of caterpillars and the dormancy of chrysalides, but her hunting had been firmly and successfully thwarted by his gaunt sister, who devoted her untiring energy to the destruction of winged insects and the preservation of her brother's celibacy. She never went out into Heathmoor society, though she occasionally played hostess at singularly uncomfortable dinners at home. These entertainments were not very popular, since escaped caterpillars sometimes came to the party, a smell of camphor and insects pervaded the house, and Miss Beaumont began yawning punctually at ten o'clock, until the last guest had departed. Then she killed some more moths. But her brother was the nucleus of Heathmoor dinners, and hostesses starting with him built up agreeable gatherings round him, for, though Heathmoor was not one atom more snobbish than other settlements of the kind, it was idle to pretend that the nephew of an earl, brother of a viscountess, and member of the Royal Entomological Society was not a good

basis on which to build a social evening. He had a charming tenor voice which he had not the slightest notion how to use ; and Heathmoor considered that, had he chosen to go on the operatic stage, there would not have been so much talk about Caruso ; while the interest with which he listened to long accounts of household difficulties with fiends in the shape of housemaids was certainly beyond all praise. At home he managed the whole affairs of the *ménage* from seeing the cook in the morning to giving his dog his supper in the evening, since his sister, when not occupied with his moths, was absorbed in Roman history.

Mr. Martin and his wife were the first to arrive, and, as usual, the vicar took up his place on the hearthrug with the air of temporary host. This, indeed, was his position at Mrs. Hancock's, for it was he whom she always left in charge of the men in the dining-room when the ladies left them to their wine, with instructions as to where the cigarettes were, and not to stop too long. It was his business also, at which he was adept, to be trumpeter in general of the honour and glory of his hostess, and refer to any late acquisition of hers in the way of motor-cars, palings, or rambler roses. In this position of host he naturally took precedence of everybody else, and his *mot* "Round collars are more than coronets" when conducting the leading lady to the dining-room in the teeth, you may say, of a baronet, dazzled Heathmoor for weeks whenever they thought of it. His wife, a plump little Dresden shepherdess, made much use of the ejaculation, "Only fancy!" and at her husband's naughtier sallies exclaimed, "Alfred, Alfred!" while she attempted to cover her face

with a very small hand to hide her laughter. Soon they were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs, and shortly after by Mr. Beaumont, who looked, as was indeed the case, as if he had been running.

Mrs. Hancock's dinners were always admirable, and since Mrs. Williams kept a book of all her menus there was no risk of guests being regaled with dishes they had lately partaken of at the house. The conversation, if anything, was slightly less varied, since, apart from contemporaneous happenings that required comment, the main topics of interest were rather of the nature of hardy perennials. Mr. Beaumont's sister was always inquired after, and usually the opinion of his uncle with regard to the latest iniquity of the Radical government. Weather, gardens, croquet were questions that starred the conversational heavens with planet-like regularity, moving in their appointed orbits, and Mr. Dobbs filled such intervals as he could spare from the mastication of his dinner with its praise.

"Delicious glass of sherry, Mrs. Hancock," he said, very early in the proceedings. "You can't buy sherry like that now."

Mr. Martin's evening clothes were not cut so as to suggest his profession. He based his influence not on his clothes, but on his human sympathy with the joys and sorrows of his friends. "There is a time to mourn, to weep, to repent," he said once in a sermon; "but undoubtedly there is a time to be as jolly as a sand-boy." He did not approve of teetotalism; any one could be a teetotaller. You are more of an example by partaking of the good things of this world in due moderation. He drank half his glass of sherry.

"I always tell Mrs. Hancock that her wine would cause a Rechabite to recant," he observed gaily.

Mrs. Martin covered her face with her hand and gave a little spurt of laughter. This was an old joke, but social gaiety would speedily become a thing of the past if we never appeared to be amused at familiar witticisms.

"Alfred, Alfred!" she said. "How can you? Is not Alfred wicked?"

Conversation became general.

"And have you begun croquet yet this year, Mr. Holroyd?" asked Mrs. Dobbs. "I suppose you will carry off all the prizes again, as you always do. I wish you would make Mr. Dobbs take to it instead of spending all his time catching slugs in the garden. So much better for him."

"Do not listen to Mrs. Dobbs, Holroyd!" cried the vicar. "I use my authority to forbid your listening to Mrs. Dobbs. The slugs spoil the flowers, and, like a greedy fellow, I want every flower in Heathmoor for Trinity Sunday."

"Alfred! Alfred!" said his wife.

"Yes, my dear, and you will never guess what Mrs. Hancock has just promised me. While she is at Bath I may order Ellis to send a basket of her best flowers up to the church every Sunday. No limitation over the basket, mind you. It shall be a clothes-basket! And as for best flowers—well, all I can say is that any one who hasn't seen Mrs. Hancock's tulips this year doesn't know what tulips can be."

Mr. Dobbs, who ate with his head perpendicularly above his plate, looked up at his wife.

"I told you salmon could be got, my dear!" he said.

"You shall have it," she said, "but don't blame me for the fishmonger's book."

Mr. Martin laughed joyfully.

"My wife tells me I mustn't play golf so much," he said, "because it gives me such an appetite that I eat her out of hearth and home. But I tell her it is one of my parochial duties. How can I get to know the young fellows of the place unless I join in their amusements? They will never tell me their difficulties and temptations unless they have found me in sympathy with their joys. And if when I am playing with them there is trouble in the long grass, and occasionally a little word, a wee naughty little word slips out—("Alfred, Alfred!")—you may be sure that I never seem to hear it."

"Well, I do call that tact!" said Mrs. Hancock genially. "But you must take a little cucumber with your salmon, Mr. Martin. This is the first cucumber Ellis has sent me in."

"A gourd—a positive gourd," said Mr. Martin, taking a slice of this remarkable vegetable. "Jonah and his whale could have sat under it."

"Is not Alfred wicked?" said his wife.

"And you are really off to Bath the day after to-morrow?" asked he. "And are going to drive all the way in your car? Though, of course, with a car like yours it is no distance at all. Sometimes I see your car on one horizon, and then, whizz, you are out of sight again over the other. But no noise, no dust, no smell. But the speed limit, Mrs. Hancock? I am tempted to say no speed limit, either."

He refrained from this audacious suggestion, and continued—

"Such an excellent steady fellow, too, you have in Denton. I always see my friend Denton coming in during the Psalms after he has taken your car home, and if he has to leave again in the middle of the sermon, I'm sure he only does at the call of duty what half the congregation would do for pleasure if they had the courage. They have my sympathy. How bored I should get if I had to listen to a long-winded parson every Sunday."

Mrs. Hancock cast an anxious eye on the asparagus. But there was a perfect haystack of it.

"How much I enjoyed your sermon last Sunday," said she, "about the duty of being cheerful and happy, and doing all we can to make ourselves happy for the sake of others. Oh, you must take more asparagus! Ellis would be miserable if it was not all eaten. It is only the second time we have had it this year."

For the moment she thought of telling Mr. Martin to supply himself with asparagus while she was at Bath. But the duty of making herself happy prevailed, and she refrained, for it occurred to her that Ellis might dispatch daily bundles early in the morning in cardboard boxes, so that they would reach Bath in time to be cooked for dinner. The hotel commissariat would certainly not rise to asparagus so early in the season.

Mrs. Martin in the meantime, with one sycophantic ear open to catch her husband's jokes, was full of fancy ejaculations to Mr. Beaumont, who was describing to her the romantic history of the female oak-egger, which exercised so extraordinary a fascination on all young males for miles around. Here Mr. Dobbs was lacking in felicity, for he

remarked that a great many unmarried young ladies would be glad to know how the female oak-egger did it. But Mr. Beaumont made it unnecessary for Mrs. Dobbs even to frown at him, so rapidly did he wonder whether it was called an oak-egger because it laid upwards of a million eggs. Then Mrs. Hancock called the attention of the table generally to the fact that the gooseberry tartlets were the produce of the garden—the first of the year—and Mr. Martin alluded to the Feast of the Blessed Innocents, saying that even massacre had a silver lining, though not for the massacred. A savoury of which Mr. Dobbs was easily induced to take a second helping brought dinner to what musicians call "a full close."

Then came the moment of the evening. Port was ruthlessly supplied by Lind to all the guests, whether they wanted it or not, and Mrs. Hancock rose with her kind brown eyes moist with emotion.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, "I have a toast to propose. I ask you to drink the health of my dear daughter and of Edward Holroyd, my future son-in-law. Your health, my dear, dear children!"

Mr. Beaumont instantly led off the musical honours on so high a note that those of the party who could sing followed with faint gasps and screams. And, under cover of the hubbub of comment and congratulation that followed, shyly and eagerly Edith's eye sought her future husband. And when his eye met hers she felt her heart rap out a tumultuous dozen of unbidden beats, fast and sweetly suffocating. Then she blushed furiously at a sudden self-accusation of indelicacy, of unmaidenness. But her heart acquitted her of

the indictment. Was it not right to give that tattoo of welcome?

The start for Bath was made in strict accordance with the scheduled plan. Filson, with the heavy luggage on the top of the motor, accompanied by Lind, her lunch, and a freshly cut bundle of asparagus destined for Mrs. Hancock's dinner in the evening, left the house in such good time that she had to wait twenty-five minutes at the station, which it took exactly three to reach. The motor returned in time for Lind to serve Mrs. Hancock's breakfast with all the finish and decorum to which she was accustomed. Then the new nine-inch footstool—Mrs. Hancock had decided against the extravagance of two—the map of the route, the large luncheon-basket, the adjustable card-table, the writing-case, a couple of new volumes from Mudie's, cloaks of varying thickness, and the great green russia leather travelling sack were conveniently bestowed, and full five minutes before the appointed time the car slid silently away from the door, with all possible provision made for a comfortable journey.

The first five minutes were spent in verifying the presence of all these conveniences, and Mrs. Hancock sank back on her carefully adjusted cushions.

"There!" she said. "We are in for it now, dear; and if all goes as well as it has begun we shall be at Bath by five. How much nicer than all the fuss of crossing London, and the risk of having somebody put into our carriage. Fancy our never having thought of motoring to Bath before! Oh, look, there is Mr. Martin going to play golf!

How early we all are this morning ! And perhaps we shall see Mr. Beaumont with his butterfly net. Then as soon as we get into the main road I shall have a look at the morning paper. There has not been a minute to glance at it yet ; or perhaps you would look at it for me, dear Edith, and tell me what there is. The motion always makes the print dance a little before my eyes. I expect the time will slip by so that we shall be astonished when we find we are at Bath, and very likely not be at all tried. And you must be on the look-out for anything interesting, and write to Edward about it, in case, when he comes down for a Sunday, he comes by motor. Then he will be on the look-out and see it, too. Why, we are at Slough already ! There is the Great Western line. Filson's train will go along there. If she had started three or four hours earlier her train might have gone by as we passed, and she could have looked out of the window and seen us. That would have been a coincidence ! "

The car ran so smoothly on the excellent surface of the Bath road that Mrs. Hancock found that the print of her *Morning Post* had not the smallest tendency to " dance," and reserving, as usual, the leaders and longer paragraphs for the digestive period after lunch, she soaked herself gently as in a warm bath, in the announcements of the arrival in London of people she had never seen, and the appearance at the opera of those she had never heard of. What taste exactly was gratified by these tit-bits of information it would be hard to say. Possibly the sense that so many people were moving backwards and forwards enhanced the enjoyment of her own leisure ; she

mentally contrasted the bustle that was incident to journeys from Paris with her own smooth, unhurrying progress to Bath. Edith, meantime following her mother's suggestion that she should look out of the window in order to be able to communicate to Edward objects of interest to be seen by the road, soon passed from external observation to introspection.

These last four or five days since she had so unemotionally accepted his offer of himself to her had about them something of the unconjectured surprises of dawn, when, after a night of travel, the darkness begins to lift off from the face of a new and unfamiliar country. It was he, in this image, who took the place of the light, and the country which its gradual illumination revealed, as it soaked through and dissolved the webs of darkness, was herself. For it is an undeniable truth that love, that absorption of self in another self, cannot take place till the giver has some notion of the nature of the gift that he brings, and Edith up till the present time was as ignorant of herself as are all girls whose emotions and womanhood have never been really roused. She had accepted her lover without knowing what devotion meant, or who it was who accepted him, except in so far that her name was Edith Hancock, her years twenty-four, and her complexion fair. For the arrows of love are at the least feathered with egotism ; they will not fly unless a conscious personality enables them to steer straight, but flutter and dip and reach no mark.

At first, frankly, she was appalled by the barrenness which the light of her lover showed. It appeared to be level land, without streams or

inspiring hill-tops, a country uncovetable, a featureless, a mountainous acreage. But it was not stonily barren ; even her eyes, unaccustomed to the light and that which it revealed, saw that. It was barren but from emptiness, and empty, perhaps only as the winter fields are bare. It was not an unkindly, an inhospitable land ; the very soil of it cried out and told her that. All day the image of her empty country, but not unkindly, hung in her mind even as an unborn melody hovers a little above the brain of the musician, until condensing like dew it melts into it. And all day, but very gradually, for these dawns of love come seldom in a blinding flash of a sun upleaping over the horizon, but rather in a slow crescendo of illumination as of a waxing flame that shall mount to who knows what transmitted fire, the first wonderful twilight of the day grew rosy. And in that morning-rose, which showed her herself, she saw also him whom it welcomed. Eagerly and with strong sense of possession, she claimed him. It was to her that he belonged ; he was hers, to be loved and adored, but also to be owned.

Outwardly, she was the Edith whom her mother knew, though in her spirit were beginning those changes which must soon make her old self a thing unrecognizable to her clearer vision. But it was scarcely strange that Mrs. Hancock saw no hint of change, for, as may have been perceived, she had the gift, or limitation of being completely taken up with the surface of things ; indeed, to her mind any inquiry into the mechanism of the spirit and its pulses was of the same indelicacy as discussion of the functions and operations of the human body. If your body was ill you went quickly to the

doctor, and did not call your friends' attention to your infirmity; if your soul was ill—— But Mrs. Hancock's soul was never ill.

They had the satisfaction of seeing a great many more Great Western trains at Reading, and passed out into the delectable country beyond. Then totally unexpected difficulties began to occur with regard to the spot where they should stop and take their lunch. Just outside Reading, indeed, there was seen an entirely suitable place, secluded, shady, out of the wind, and strongly recommended by Denton, but unfortunately it was then only a quarter-past one, and Mrs. Hancock had not intended to lunch till half-past. Therefore they pushed on, going rather slow so as not to miss any really proper encamping ground. Ten minutes later they were again favoured by an oak-tree and a sheltering hedge, but here unfortunately a tramp was asleep by the wayside. At any moment he might wake, and prove to be intoxicated, and Mrs. Hancock was quite sure she could not enjoy her lunch in his vicinity. Further on again there was a wayside cottage too near a proposed halting-place, for children might come out of it and stare, and the cottage was succeeded by a smell of brick fields. Before long Tilehurst began to show up roofs, and it was necessary to get clear of Tilehurst on the far side before any sort of serenity could be hoped for. Then for nearly a mile they had to follow an impenetrable flock of sheep, and it was imperative to get well ahead of them. Pangbourne appeared, and it was already after two o'clock. It will hardly be credited that they had scarcely got free of this contaminating village when a tyre punctured. A halt was inevitable while it

was being repaired, but then Denton could not eat while he was mending it, and since they would have to stop again for Denton to have his lunch (since he could not drive during that process), it was better to make a halt for general refreshments when the tyre trouble was overpast.

Mrs. Hancock looked despairingly round.

"It is most annoying," she said. "I do not know that we should not have done better to have had lunch at an inn at Reading, or to have stopped at that first place. Remember to tell Edward, dear, to look out for that first place if he drives down ; there is positively nowhere after that where he can find a quiet spot. I wonder if we had better eat a couple of biscuits now in case we can't find a suitable place soon. Dear me, here come those sheep again ! They ought not to be allowed to drive sheep along a road that is meant for carriages. Put the window up, dear, against the dust."

Suddenly illumination like a cloud-piercing ray shone on Edith. It struck her that all her life had been spent in looking for a place to have lunch in, so to speak, in putting up windows for fear of the dust, in avoiding the proximity of tramps. Infinitesimal as was the occasion, it seemed to throw an amazing light on to her life. Up till the present it was hardly an exaggeration to say that anything more important, anything more directly concerned with existence had never happened to her. Was it this comfortable ordered life in which an infinite agglomeration of utterly trivial things made up the sum total that caused her lately discovered country to appear so barren? She looked at her mother's face ; it was flushed

with childish annoyance, just as it had been about three years ago when a perfectly satisfactory housemaid gave notice because she was going to be married. Since then she could remember nothing that had so disconcerted her mother, except when once Denton shut the corner of the new fur carriage-rug into the hinge of the motor-door. On both these previous occasions she had been impressed with the magnitude of the moment ; now she felt slightly inclined to laugh. Even if the unthinkable, the supreme disaster happened, and they did not lunch at all, would the world come completely to an end?

But a second glance at her mother's face checked her tendency to laugh, and encouraged a feeling that was quite as novel to her. She felt suddenly and overwhelmingly sorry that this drive, this lunch which her mother had planned with such care and with such pleased anticipation of comfort, should have disappointed her. It was like a child's disappointment over the breakage of a toy or the non-fulfilment of some engaging expedition. There was laughter in her heart no longer ; only a tenderness, a commiseration that sympathized in womanly fashion with a childish trouble.

It is darkest before dawn, and this Cimmerian gloom, composed of puncture and the absence of a possible luncheon place, began to lift. Denton was handy with his tools ; the sheep were herded through a gate into a field by the roadside, so that when they went on again there was no further passage through the flock to be negotiated. Goring streamed swiftly by them, and hardly were they quit of its outlying houses when a soft stretch of grass by the roadside, uncontaminated by tramp

and untenanted by child, spread itself before their eyes. And Mrs. Hancock, as she finished the last jam puff, was more beaming than the sun of this lovely May afternoon.

" I'm not sure that it was not worth while going through all these annoyances and delays," she said, " to have found such a lovely place and to have enjoyed our lunch so much. I was afraid the jam might have run out of the puffs ; but it was as safe as if they had just come up from the kitchen. I wish Edward was here to have enjoyed it with us. You must tell him what a good lunch we had ! "

And Edith found her mother's enjoyment as tenderly pathetic as her disappointment had been.

CHAPTER V

COMFORTABLE SETTLEMENTS

EDWARD HOLROYD had arranged to go down to Bath for a certain Saturday till Monday, some fortnight after the safe arrival there (on the stroke of five) of Mrs. Hancock's motor. He had spent a couple of rather lonely weeks at Heathmoor since the departure of his neighbours, and he was pleased to find how much he missed Edith. His failure to achieve poignant emotion over his engagement had troubled him ; he was distressed about the indolence of his temperament. He had never yet seen a girl whom he so much admired and liked, but the very fact that he was able to contemplate her image and tell himself how charming she was, seemed to him part of that failure. She affected him with the same degree of emotion that a spring morning or a melodious song stirred in him. He could, while basking in her charm, tell himself that he basked ; he was not by the exquisiteness of the conditions rendered in the least oblivious of himself ; his sensations had not any overpowering mastery over him. Duly he sat and thought about her when he got home in the evening from his day in the City, duly and honestly he told himself how delightful her perpetual presence would be to him. But he did not dream and doat ; he never lost himself in haze of rapture ; he was not blinded

by any intolerable brightness. But he wanted immensely to see her again ; he missed her as much as he was capable of missing anything. But his industry at his office and his appetite at his dinner were wholly unaffected, though they would quite certainly have been impaired if for any reason his engagement had been broken off. She was the nicest girl he had ever seen, and in the autumn she was going to marry him.

To-night, on the eve of his departure to Bath, he reminded himself many times of his great good fortune. He had known friends who had suffered the torments of the lost over the obduracy or the indifference of girls whom they wanted to marry, and his sympathy with such men was tinged with jealousy that they felt so keenly. She had been neither indifferent nor obdurate ; she had at once granted him his heart's desire. And then he faced the question that arose out of his fortunate situation. Would he have suffered unutterable torments if she had refused him? He knew he would not.

The night was warm ; a full moon rode high in an unclouded heaven ; and he let himself out of the French windows of his drawing-room into the small lawn behind the house. A windless calm reigned, and the shadow of the trees that bounded his lawn fell in sharp unwavering outline on the dewy grass. Next door the black mass of Mrs. Hancock's house, unpierced by any lights except the small illuminated square from servants' rooms in the top story, stood with blinds drawn down over the windows, solid, concrete, comfortable, a brick and mortar rendering of the ordered life that was lived there. No roofs, he felt sure, leaked ; no windows stuck ; no door squealed on its hinges ;

and its inhabitants, whom he knew so well, to whom he was so sincerely attached, were equally strangers to squealing and leaking. Soul and body they were watertight ; undesirable emotions no more percolated into their souls than did rain-water into their roofs ; they stood with their well-built walls cool in summer and warm in winter ; their windows never rattled when gales bugled outside. And he himself, he knew also, was in the same excellent state of repair ; it was a characteristic of Heathmoor to be in an excellent state of repair. They all stood like that, side by side in detached residences, with small though charming gardens behind.

For the moment he was in revolt against this deadly respectability ; then, with a comical despair, he knew that he was not even in revolt. He could not do more than imagine being in revolt. Rightly or wrongly, he connected all this well-ordered comfort, those eggs and bacon for breakfast and buttered toast for tea with his inability to feel keenly. Life had never stung or prodded him any more than it appeared to have stung or prodded Mrs. Hancock ; and that she could be stung or prodded by anything was beyond the bounds of the most fantastic imagination. There were no wasps' nests in all Heathmoor ; the gardens were too well looked after. And there were no psychical wasps or gadflies either ; the gospel of Mr. Martin, preached so regularly and convincingly every Sunday, made it a sin to be otherwise than cheerful and contented and well-fed. No disturbing influence ever came down in those first-class carriages ; not even Mrs. Grundy ever paid them a visit ; she left her own dear children

to look after themselves with a complete and untroubled confidence in their good behaviour.

As for Edward, his conduct had from boyhood upwards been such as to justify that lady's absence. In life he was a natural Grundyite, indisposed to the venial if unjustifiable violences of youth, not so much from a lack of vitality or, on the other hand, from high principle, but from a sheer, innate respectability which beat in his blood. He had been one of those boys who never have given their parents a moment's anxiety, not from any stern sense of right behaviour, but because he was that exceedingly rare product in a world that is almost entirely composed of exceptions—a perfectly normal young man, one, that is, who lies just about upon the mean which is fixed resultantly by contending forces. He was that *lusus naturæ*, an average young man, a sport, an exception, a rare variety (to be collected by the Mr. Beaumont of human moths), an instance in himself of the average, which in the sum is made up of quantities of specimens, none of which is average. He was in life and conduct what the average young man is supposed to be and, in the mass, not individually, is. He was neither milksop nor adventurer, neither celibate by nature nor debauchee. He was not miserly with money or spendthrift, neither devout nor irreligious. In two points only did he depart from the perfect specimen of the average : he was exceedingly good-looking, and he had been a dreamer, though his dream-blossoms as yet had borne no fruit. Indeed, as has been already stated, he had largely acquiesced in their barrenness, and in the matter of the ideal She had shaken himself awake. Round one subject only did they linger,

that was music, in regard to which, so far as he performed at all, he was so atrocious a practitioner.

It was long past midnight as he stood there in his garden and surveyed the solidity of the house next door, and the novelty (to him) of his reflections about it had been perhaps induced by his listening that night to that out of which his dreams were made, for he had just come back—motoring down in great comfort—from a performance at the opera of the "Gotterdämmerung." All evening he had been wrapped and absorbed in the immense tragedy of its portentous people, and just now they and their woes and their loves seemed to him more real, more essentially existent than all the actual and tangible things with which he was surrounded. They were the substance of which this moonlight, this square house next door, the remembrance of Edith even, were but the shadows of the spaces they moved among, even as the shadows on the grass were but an accident of light occurring to the trees that cast them. On such a night after the uproar of cosmic cataclysm the moon shone on the waters of the Rhine with their restored treasure ; through a hundred and a thousand such nights Brunnhilde slept below her breast-plate on the mountain-top, maiden, but goddess no more, till to Siegfried's soul she resumed a nobler divinity. . . . And that divine duet, with its webs of melody passing through and through it like a shuttle of pure light, was but the expression of love, such love as it had been given to man to feel, since a man wrote and recorded it. It was such music now that his soul should be making when he thought of Edith. But he knew that no such frenzy of fire inspired him ; if his soul sang

it was but a cheerful little tune, admirably adapted to the domestic hearth. And that was the best music he could make. Anyhow, it had no wrong notes in it ; it had no wild cadences or broken and sobbing rhythms. It was just a cheerful little tune such as they sang in church about morning gilding the skies. You only had to substitute "moon" for "morning" . . . and you were as jolly and comfortable as possible.

Edward began to be aware that his brain was dictating thoughts which his conscious mind did not endorse. They resembled the tissue of confused images which lie on the borderland which intervenes between the sheer incoherence of sleeping dreams and the drowsiness which precedes it. But there was an uneasy, though only momentary, wonder in his mind whether these disordered images sprang not from the poppy soil of sleep but from a gradually awakening brain, whether they were not the light at the end of a tunnel rather than the dimness of its entrance. The cool cells of thought had grown feverish with the excitement of the drama he had just seen . . . or had they begun to stir to their own proper activity? Which was real, in fact, the white cool flame of the moonlight as it shone on still trees and dewy grass, or the song of Siegfried, which burned the sunset air and blinded with rapture the eyes of Brunnhilde, when she woke, goddess no more, and by that the more divine?

Heathmoor, the essential spirit of Heathmoor, in the incarnation of the striking of the clock at the livery stables, came to his rescue, for it unmistakably reminded him that the hour was two in the morning—a time which probably occurred

every night, but a time of which the evidence was a matter of inference rather than experience. He hailed it as a navigator driving before the wind in rock-sown and dangerous waters might hail a harbour light that betokened an inlet in a wave-beaten and inexorable cliff. He could "put in," and escape from these threats of wave-crest and storm. It was long past the proper time to go to bed, or, in Heathmoor phrase, he would "never" get up in the morning.

But that waiting in the still moonlight shadowed by the unwavering trees had been a moment of revelation. A little light, coming from the realms of music where alone his imagination worked, had been blinked into the windows of the dark and tidy room where otherwise he lived. It was like a distant lightning flash coming at night to a room where in a cool clean bed a man lay drowsy but awake. He wondered whether the storm would move nearer. And before he slept he wondered whether Edith would understand. She knew he was "fond of music." Would she understand that "fond of music" was a mere phrase of nonsense if meant to convey what it held for him?

He fell into a slightly priggish sleep.

He arrived at the admirable Star Hotel at Bath next afternoon, and found a room had been engaged for him by Mrs. Hancock, who, with Edith, welcomed him at the station. He had been uncertain whether he was her guest or not, but she at once put an end to all doubt on this point by telling him that she had bargained with the manager on his behalf, and that he had granted him the reduced terms on which she, making a long stay, was entertained, which saved him

half-a-crown a day, and included the unlimited use of the bathroom. Of course he would use their sitting-room quite freely, just as if it was his own.

"And I can't tell you how pleased I am to see you, dear Edward," she said, laying a cordial hand on his knee. "We will have tea at once, as my bath is at half-past five, and I like to reach the establishment a full ten minutes before the hour, and so after tea you and Edith will be left to your own devices. What a lot you will have to tell each other, for it's a fortnight and three days since we left home, though I'm sure it doesn't seem more than a week. Ellis sends us a bundle of asparagus every morning, and says it will last another ten days at least. They are most civil about having it cooked, and don't charge a penny for it or for giving melted butter with it. I quite expected they would charge for the melted butter!"

This seemed to be the sum of Mrs. Hancock's news, and shortly after tea (she had brought her own tea with her, which, perhaps, served to counterbalance the munificence of the management as regards the melted butter) she went off to her bath, leaving the two together.

Edward had occupied a chair, while Edith sat on the sofa; now he came beside her.

"Well?" he said, capturing her hand.

Edith looked at him as she had never looked before; her eyes sought and held and embraced him.

"Tell me all you have been doing," she said, "especially the little things. I think the little things matter most. They are more intimate."

"But I want your news," said he.

She flushed a little.

"I have wanted you," she said simply. "What a little thing!"

Not till then did he understand the change that had come over her in this last fortnight—the change that concerned him alone. It was clear that the music which her soul made was no cheerful little chant. Inarticulate, it sang and soared. A little of that fire leaped across to him, kindling him.

"That was sweet of you!" he said. "But it makes me feel rather nervous. What if you are disappointed?"

She came a little closer to him.

"I've got an awful confession to make!" she said. "When—when you asked me first, I was so pleased and glad, but I didn't care. Not care. But since then——" She looked up at him.

"I care so much," she said. "And I want to be worthy. You have such fine thoughts, Edward, thoughts so much above me. I've always known that, but now that I care for you I realize it. When you play, for instance, you are hearing things I am deaf to, seeing visions, perhaps, that I am blind to. But I do want to learn. Will you teach me? Nobody but you can teach me."

Her confession ennobled her; he saw a glimpse of her far above him. All the years that he had known her he had thought that there was nothing up high like that. But it had always been there; it wanted but the sun and wind of love to part the cloud and show the shining peaks. Human peaks, divine peaks, the highlands of dawning love. She was beginning to realize for herself, quite easily, quite without effort all that he lacked, all that in

the vague dream of his youth he believed to lie outside of him. Already she was there, her foot on the eternal snows, bathed in the eternal sunshine. The commonest and greatest miracle of all was in process within; the waterpots were already reddening with the true grape.

"I never guessed," she said. "And, oh, Edward, if only caring made me less stupid! But be patient with me and wait for me to learn. I shall be able to learn if you will teach me. There is a whole great world round me, full of splendour and beauty, which somehow doesn't come in one's way at Heathmoor. I think"—and she laughed—"I think the asparagus, so to speak, shuts it out. But it is there; it's everywhere. You took me right up to it, and even then I didn't recognize it at once. Now I am beginning to recognize it. I get glimpses of it, anyhow."

This was near enough to the dream-thoughts that had come to him last night as he looked at the square house next door to enable him to join her. But she, who besought him to teach her, spoke authentically of what she had seen; he, the teacher, but babbled and halted over things imagined and not realized.

"Ah, that is so much what I felt last night," he said. "I went to the 'Gotterdämmerung' in town, and when I came back I stood in the garden, and all that you say was in my mind. There is a splendid world round us, and too much asparagus. I don't mean——"

She guessed just what he stopped himself from saying.

"But mother is such a dear," she said. "I love her comfortable little plans. They are as touching

as a child's. I wouldn't spoil her pleasure for anything. Tell me about the 'Gotterdämmerung'; it is all that which I want to learn. There's love in it, and tragedy, all big. Music says what you feel. Isn't that it? I can see it does to you when you play. And what music says to you, you, the fact of you, say to me."

Yet he felt this was exactly the same girl whom he had long known, comfortable, pleasant, pretty. The change was but the change that happens to a plant when the spike of blossoms shoots upwards from its heart, and was not so much change as growth. She had shot up, far away ahead of him with her budding stem, and all the time she thought she was reaching up to him. And he, gratified and a little embarrassed, thought so, too.

"You mustn't say such things to me," he said. "It makes me feel as if—as if you had put me on a pedestal, somehow. But it is true that music says to me things which turn into ideas, longings, aspirations. But, so far from me teaching you what it means, it is you who have got to teach me. It is you who are the explanation of it all. Don't you see——"

He stopped a moment, trying himself to grasp the thought which eluded him. So, at least, he imagined to himself; in reality he sought the fire that should kindle him. And fire of a sort was not hard to find, for they sat alone together, and she, whom he liked and admired, clung to him. He kissed her and found himself nearer to passion than he had ever been yet.

"It must have been you that I was looking for," he said.

Again in her the tremulous flame of a girl's first love shot up, fed with the new fuel. Then, by a sudden impulse, she got up and stood a little away from him, passing her hand over her eyes.

"I feel as if it can't be," she said, "and yet when you say it is, I can't disbelieve you. But are you sure?"

He got up also.

"I tell you the truth when I say that I never cared like this before," he said. "All that I know of love is yours; you lit it."

She looked at him mutely, inquiring, scrutinizing. Something within her wanted more, wanted a conviction that she had not yet got. It was as if there was still some closed chamber in her heart that was not yet flooded; the tide did not flow freely throughout her. And for that moment's space she wondered if he, too, was in the same incomplete stress of emotion, if the entire abandonment which she knew she lacked held off from him.

For a moment only the doubt lasted, the next it was enough for her that so much was hers already; the unfolding of love was at work on the petals of her girlhood, and she did not even desire to hurry the hour of full-blowing.

That for the present was the apex of the mounting flame in her, which made the air round it quiver and glow, so that its heat and radiance were beginning to touch with lambency all the common things of every day around her, transforming them, as by the light of an Indian sunset, into opalescent brightnesses. Already to her the sun was of a wider light, the wind of May more caressing, the fields greener, the faces she passed in the street lit with a happiness and a humanity

she had never noticed before. She saw and heard and apprehended all that touched her senses with a greater vividness ; the paper she read from to Mrs. Hancock when she rested after her bath had a new significance, and as she conned aloud the list of surnames of those who had been born, married, and died—which was the opening chapter of the daily lecture, in case her mother knew any of them—she found herself wondering about the history of their loves. The most commonplace events filled her with reflections which, though delightfully commonplace themselves, were utterly new to her as material for thought. If the Prime Minister went to Balmoral—the kind of news that was particularly gratifying to Mrs. Hancock—Edith now was interested in it, not from wonder—like her mother—as to what they would say to each other, but because before the Prime Minister was a baby in his cradle, a man and a woman had looked with eyes of dawning love on each other. The whole world was vivified, a keener pleasure infused the common actions of life, she ate and drank with a new savour, she went to sleep with a more luxurious sense of that drowsy gulf, and, above all, she awoke with welcome for the day. She joined every morning the ranks of those living and sentient things to whom the knowledge of love had come ; she was struggling, yet the struggle was effortless, as if a new force invading her soul did the battle for her—on to the level of real existence, leaving the desert for fertile lands. She read the secret in the eyes and mouths of those she met in the street, for they knew it, even as did the wind and the sun, and the stars that wheeled. Sometimes she spoke of this new thing

to her mother, who must be among the initiated, and then the wing of comedy shed a feather as it passed. Mrs. Hancock's reminiscences of her beautiful days were of the nature of pressed flowers; it seemed that their fragrance had departed, though they retained their outward form.

"Your father was a very handsome young man, dear," she would say—"very handsome, indeed, with a rather bluish chin, for at that time he had no beard. I don't think there can ever have been a more poetical lover, and scarcely a day passed when he did not bring me some volume of Tennyson's early poems, or Mr. Browning's. Edith, if you would put the window just an inch more up we can talk. Thank you, dear! He could understand all Mr. Browning wrote about different ways of love, and explained it most beautifully. There was 'One Way of Love' and 'Another Way of Love,' and one of them happened about the middle of June. I learned that one by heart in order to please him. He used to say the most wonderful of all was 'By the Fireside,' which was in November; but that was after they married. Oh, look, dear; what a tiresome dog! Some day it will be run over, and it won't be Denton's fault. Your father was very jealous, and, though I hope you will never give Edward any cause for that any more, I am sure, than I did, men are like that sometimes, and they don't seem to be able to help it. He was quite devoted to me, so it sprang from a good cause. Yes, he used to read Mr. Browning's poems, though he was very fond of Mrs. Browning's too. Mr. and Mrs. Browning! What a lot of poetry they must have read to each other—all made up by themselves! I wonder if she

understood it as well as your father! He never found any difficulty about carrying on the sense between the lines, which I think is the hardest part. And to think that now you are going through the same happy time! Darling, look, it is half-past three; and we must turn at once, else we shall never get home in time for tea. Will you tell Denton down the tube to turn as soon as he possibly can? When we get home I will let you read the copies of Mr. Browning's poems which your father gave me. Have you heard from Edward this morning? When he comes I shall have to talk to him about business."

This business talk, which, so far as Mrs. Hancock was concerned, followed on the lines which she had laid down for herself in the matter of allowance for Edith, took place next morning. He had suggested the more usual course that their respective solicitors should represent their clients' views to each other, but Mrs. Hancock preferred a personal and direct interview. She felt that Edward, who was so generous, would understand the somewhat peculiar position that she fully intended to take up, whereas the more practical and less sympathetic mind of a solicitor might not see things in so romantic a light. So Edith was informed when it was twenty minutes to eleven and time that she should put her hat on, while Edward was told that it was quite excusable that he should not want to go to church after sitting in an airless office all the week. But it was a little chilly, and she asked him to shut completely the window of the sitting-room.

"And now, dear Edward," she said, "we must have a little business talk, which I am sure will

soon be done, since I am as certain to approve of your plans about Edith as you are to approve of mine. And then, when we have talked it over, we can instruct our solicitors, and they will draw up the settlement. Please smoke a cigarette; you will be more comfortable so. There we are!"

Mrs. Hancock, indeed, felt perfectly comfortable. She had pictured her plans in such delicious grandmotherly colours to herself that they could not fail to touch Edward's heart. And she proceeded to lay them before him.

"I am what they call fairly off, my dear," she said, "and, indeed, I put by a little every year, though, as you know, to do that I live extremely simply, just with the ordinary little comforts of life to which I have been accustomed. Now at my death every penny of my fortune will go to Edith, with the exception of two or three little bequests to servants. At present it is something over a hundred thousand pounds. You and Edith will enjoy that for many, many years after I am gone."

Mrs. Hancock felt as if she was making some deed of tremendous generosity; the sense of that and the allusion to her own death caused her eyes to stand in moisture, which she wiped away with one of her new handkerchiefs, which were so expensive.

"But I am beginning at the end," she said, "and we must come back to the present. I mean, dear Edward, to give Edith the whole of her trousseau. I shall be very much vexed with you if you want not to let me have my way about that. Everything she can want, and, indeed, much more than I ever had, in the way of frocks and linen, shall be hers, and shall be paid for by me. Put

your cigarette in your mouth, and don't think of interrupting me."

She beamed delightedly at him, sure that had she not positively forbidden it he would have protested against her munificence. Munificence, too, she really thought it, when she considered how much lace. . . .

"But that is not my great plan," she said. "I know so well, without your telling me, that you will shower on Edith more than a girl accustomed to the simplicity of life she has hitherto led can possibly dream of spending, and so I have thought of a great expense which, please God, will certainly come upon you and her, which you have not, I expect, taken into consideration. Children, my dear Edward; I want it to be my pleasure and privilege to provide for them, and, with careful management, I shall be able to give each of your children as they are born the sum of a hundred pounds, and on every one of all their birthdays, if they live to be a hundred, fifty pounds more!"

To Mrs. Hancock's ears this sounded immense. It is true that her original plan had been to make the yearly birthday gift a hundred pounds to each of them, but in the interval between forming that idea and to-day she had seen that such a scheme would amount to a lavishness that was positively unreasonable, if not actually wrong. It is true that it was not exactly likely that she would continue to be in a position to shower this largess on children that were yet unborn for a hundred years after their birth, unless she was to outrival the decades of old Parr; but the sentence sounded well, and expressed, though hyperbolically, the sumptuous extent of her inten-

tions. But she had to climb down from those great heights, and proceeded to small details.

"Take another cigarette, Edward," she said, "or otherwise you will be arguing with me, and, as I have quite made up my mind, there would be no use in that. My dear, I am a very determined person when once my mind is made up, and I shan't listen to your remonstrances, so you needn't trouble to make them. There! I can afford to do this, and since I can, I am determined to. Now, as regards smaller matters, I know you are very well off, but I want to spare you any extra expenses that I possibly can, and a hundred little schemes occur to me. I send myself to sleep at night with thinking what I can take on my shoulders, for I assure you it is the little drains on one's purse that make the big hole in it, so in the first place let me tell you that your motor bills for tyres and petrol needn't be a penny more after your marriage than they are to-day. I intend that Edith—and I shall tell her so—shall consider my car as hers, in exactly the same manner as she has always considered it ours, shall we say? Morning and afternoon, whenever she feels inclined, she can have her drive with me, on *my* tyres, and on *my* petrol. You will be sure when you are away in the City that your car won't be scouring all over the country, eating up every penny you make."

There is a psychical phenomenon known as suggestion, whereby the operator produces a hypnotic effect on his subject, causing his mind to receive and adopt the desired attitude. For the moment, at any rate, Mrs. Hancock was producing this effect on Edward; her own sublime conviction

that she was making the most generous provision infected him as she reeled off this string of benefits. But there are subtle conditions under which suggestion acts, which, perhaps, she did not appreciate, for at this point the effect began to wear off. Probably she should have stopped there; unfortunately she continued. It may be that she began to see through herself, and thus enabled her subject to see through her.

"Household books, too!" she said. "You have no conception, nor has Edith—for it takes years of careful housekeeping to understand all about it—you have no conception what economies can be made in them, nor, if you do not practise them, what a tremendous drain they are. Let us say that Edith is alone for lunch, while you are in the City, and she orders a fillet of sole, and a cutlet, with some French beans, and a little cherry tart, and perhaps a peach to finish up with, for dear Edith has such an excellent appetite, I am glad to say, and is not like so many women who, when they are alone, have a sandwich on a tray or a piece of cake, and find themselves getting anæmic and run down in consequence. Edith, as I was saying, orders a decent little lunch like what she is accustomed to, every day like that, when she is alone, and at the end of the week I shouldn't wonder if her lunches had cost her twenty-five or thirty shillings. Well, I want to spare you all that expense; there will be lunch for Edith every day at my house, so that all the household books for your purse will be a couple of poached eggs in the morning and a plain little dinner in the evening, if you want to be alone with her. Otherwise you can both find your dinner, and such a warm

welcome, my dear, as often as you like where she had her lunch. And even if it costs me another gardener, I am determined to have my croquet-lawn as good as a croquet-lawn can be, and you can come across and play on it, and have your cup of tea or your whisky and soda with me any day you like. I mean to turn my house into a hotel for you and my darling, where you will ask for whatever you like, motors and what not, and never have a bill sent in to you. Everything provided, Edward, all the year round, and the warmest welcome from the old proprietress. There! I don't think I can say more than that; and I certainly don't mean less. About wedding presents I shall say nothing, because I mean them to be a surprise."

But the suggestive glamour had faded, and Edward found himself adding up in a clear-sighted and business-like manner what this all amounted to. Immediately the result seemed to be that Mrs. Hancock would have Edith's companionship at lunch and in her drives, and that he could play croquet next door. Edith the day before had alluded to her mother's childlike pleasure in her plans, but it seemed to him that a certain power of parsimonious calculation presided over their childlikeness, and it was not without a sense of surprise and almost of incredulity that he made the inference that Mrs. Hancock had no intention of giving her daughter any allowance or of settling anything on her. For himself, he could not by any stretch of malignant criticism be called niggardly or close-handed, and he felt justified in making quite sure of the unlooked-for situation.

"Then you do not propose to settle anything

on Edith," he asked, "or make her any allowance?"

He knew that this was a perfectly proper suggestion to make, that the absence of any provision for Edith was ludicrous, yet the moment he had made the suggestion he was sorry. He understood also what Edith had meant by "childlikeness," for Mrs. Hancock's face changed suddenly from its beaming and delighted aspect, and looked pathetic, hurt, misunderstood. It was clear that she had taken the sincerest pleasure in devising all these dazzling plans, which at present, anyhow, cost her nothing, and in avoiding any direct expenditure. She had quite certainly convinced herself of her own generosity, and of the unselfish thought and ingenuity—which caused her to lie awake at night—that had devised those schemes. But this miserliness, the ingenuity of which was so perfectly transparent to anybody else, was not, he felt convinced, transparent to her. Hurriedly he corrected himself ; it was as if he had unthinkingly taken a toy away from a child ; now he made the utmost haste to restore it, to anticipate the howl in preparation for which it had opened its mouth.

"How stupid of me!" he said. "I had quite forgotten in the multitude of your gifts that you were providing with such generosity for our children. Of course you do that instead of giving money to Edith. I think that is a delightful plan. Why, they will all be heirs and heiresses by the time they grow up. And the lunches and drives for Edith, too ; she will never be lonely while I am away in town. And the croquet and everything. I never heard so many nice plans."

He knew he was being weak, was yielding on points on which he really had no business to yield, in order to avoid a scene. It was quite ridiculous —and he was aware of that fact—to treat this middle-aged and wideawake woman as if she was a child, to give her anything to prevent her howling, but the morality of the matter did not trouble him at all. She was like a child ; he saw the resemblance ; but no less striking was the resemblance to a selfish child, or to a very miserly grown-up person. He did not really doubt that some part of her brain, carefully walled up and sequestered, knew that she was acting in a thoroughly miserly manner, but she entirely refused to attend to that, treating it as we treat some involuntary suggestion of a disobedient mind, putting it from her even as she put away secular reflections when in church, and indulging instead and painting in tender but vivid colours the image of the beloved old granny—not so old, either—incessantly signing the most sumptuous cheques for the benefit of her beloved chicks, or looking from the drawing-room window on to the velvet-napped croquet-lawn where Edward stood with brimming whisky and soda, while Edith, a child tugging at her skirts, went through hoop after hoop. She loved to see everybody happy round her, all enjoying the fruits of her bounty, and if, incidentally, she herself gained a companion in her daily drives, at any rate Edith would not sit solitary over her expensive lunch while Edward was in town. And if, in reality, she was a somewhat selfish person, and one somewhat insincere, how much more comfortable that she should think that she was brimming with kind plans for other

people, when as a matter of fact she was only making the most pleasing schemes for herself. It was not possible entirely to agree with her in her estimate of herself, but there was certainly no use in distressing her by letting her know that he saw through her. She had hypnotized herself —by excessive gazing—into her creed about herself, and any dissension from it was only likely to make her think that the dissentient was unkind, not shake her belief in her own tender benevolence. She started from that even as Euclid starts his amazing propositions from certain postulates ; if you did not accept the postulates you could not proceed any further in her company.

Normal human vanity renders complete self-knowledge impossible, but complete self-blindness is almost equally uncommon, and at the very back of her mind Mrs. Hancock knew very well that she was acting in a manner which, if occurring in anybody else, she would have unhesitatingly labelled mean. But she never indulged in such thoughts about herself ; she turned a deliberate back upon them, for they were rankly inconsistent with the spirit of cheerful selfishness which was the key to her character. She shut the door on them as she shut it on tales of misery and crime, ignoring and, if necessary, denying their existence. And if it was easy to spoil her childlike pleasures, it was easy also to restore them in all their integrity, and Edward's assurance that he had never heard so many nice plans was amply sufficient for her. Again her well-favoured face beamed with delighted smiles.

"I thought you would like them," she said, shutting the door not only on her knowledge of

her meanness, but on his also, "and you have no idea what a pleasure it was to me to make them. So, since you approve, we will regard my share of the arrangements as settled. And now for your part. I am certain I shall be as satisfied with what you intend to do as you are with my intentions. But before we go on you must tell me what I have to do. Must I have a deed drawn up? Is it a deed they call it?"

He was careful not to spoil pleasure this time.

"I think that is scarcely necessary," he said. "You see you are—are making no settlements on Edith. You have promised to do certain things for our children, but for the present, anyhow——"

She interrupted.

"I see," she said, "but you must be certain to tell me whenever it is necessary for me to have a deed drawn up. I shall be always ready to do it, and to thank you for reminding me. Well, then."

She settled herself in her chair with an air of pleased expectation, and, it must be confessed, a secret gratification that she had not got to "put her name" to anything at all.

"I shall draw up a will," he said, "settling the whole of my property on Edith in trust for her children, if she has any, and, if not, for her use during her lifetime. In other words, she will enjoy the interest on my money, though the property itself will be in the hands of trustees. It amounts at present to about thirty thousand pounds."

Edward paused, for it was clear that Mrs. Hancock was pondering some point.

"Let me thoroughly understand," she said. "In case of your death, Edward, without children

(though it really is quite horrid to think about such a thing), if she wanted to build herself a little house, shall we say, would she not be able to put her hand on three or four thousand pounds?"

"No. She would have the income from my money for life."

Mrs. Hancock was almost as eager to secure financial advantages for Edith, as she was to retain her own herself—almost, not quite.

"But she would find it difficult to live in a suitable house, the sort of house to which she has been accustomed, on the interest of thirty thousand pounds," said she.

"Do you think so? It means about fifteen hundred a year."

"Yes, I know, my dear, a very nice pleasant little income. But you must think what she has been accustomed to, for I must say that, though, as you know, I live very simply, yet I have never grudged Edith anything. Think if she was ill! A long illness is so terribly expensive. Would it not be better to insure your life, and settle that on her, so that she could have a little fund for a rainy day? I know my husband insured his life long before he married me."

Edward stiffened a little.

"I think, then, she might look to you for assistance," he said.

"Ah, how pleased I should be to make any economies for her sake," she said, with feeling. "But what if I am no longer here to help her?"

"In that case she will have all your money in her complete command," he remarked.

This was undoubtedly the case, and it was not possible to pursue that particular line of grabbing

any further. She smiled at him not quite so tenderly.

"My dear, how sharp the City makes you business men," she observed.

Heathmoor seemed to have done pretty well in that line for her, but he did not draw attention to that.

"I don't think I feel inclined to make any further provision over that," he said. "Edith is coming to me, I must remind you, quite portionless."

A sudden resentment at her attitude seized him.

"Or how would it be if you and I both insured our lives for, let us say, ten thousand pounds," he suggested, "and settled it on her?"

Mrs. Hancock became dignified.

"At my death," she said, "she already comes into a considerable fortune."

"Very well. I quite agree with you that no further provision is necessary."

Mrs. Hancock had not much liked the reminder that Edith came portionless to him, and did not want that section of the argument—for it really was becoming an argument—pursued further. She retreated into her stronghold of satisfaction again.

"And now about the allowance you will make her?" she asked genially.

"I was proposing to give her two hundred and fifty a year for her private and personal expenses," he said.

Mrs. Hancock's smile completely faded.

"Yes," she said, "yes."

"I gather from your tone that you are not satisfied?" said he.

There was a short, rather unpleasant pause. Then she assumed an air of confiding candour.

"I did expect, dear Edward," she said, "that you would make a rather larger allowance than that for her. It is no use my denying it. And would you mind not smoking another cigarette just yet? The air is getting quite thick. Now, just as you have told me quite frankly what you think of my provision for Edith, so I will tell you. There is nothing like a perfectly frank talk for getting over difficulties. All her life dear Edith has had a very handsome allowance from me, with really nothing to spend it on except a dress or a pair of boots. I don't deny that I have often stinted myself so as not to stint her, but what her mother has done, that, I think, her husband should do. I don't think you consider how many more calls a married woman has on her purse than a girl living at home—all the running up to London to get household necessities for you, all the greater expenditure on dress that a married woman must make beyond what a girl requires. Indeed, I don't see how Edith can manage it on the sum you mention."

Edward's sympathy with Mrs. Hancock's child-like pleasure evaporated. He did not believe for a moment that the "very handsome allowance" given her by her mother amounted to anything like the sum he proposed. He knew also that the sum he proposed was a very reasonable one.

"If you would tell me how much she has hitherto spent," he said, "I should have some guide."

This Mrs. Hancock did not in the least wish to do.

"I do not mean to say that dear Edith is extravagant," said she, "but there is a great deal of difference between extravagance and counting every penny. There has been no need for her to do that; she is not accustomed to it."

It was impossible for him to ask her point blank what Edith's allowance had been; it was impossible also to ask the girl herself. He could not do such things; they were contrary to his average politeness of behaviour.

"It is true that when I settled to give Edith this allowance," he said, "I supposed that you would also give her something. I did not know what your intentions might be."

Mrs. Hancock brightened.

"But you do now, dear Edward," she said, "and you said you quite appreciate them. Dear me, what was the expression you used which warmed my heart so? Oh, yes; you had never heard so many nice plans. I am going to provide—and I assure you the more it costs me the better shall I be pleased—for your children when I give Edith, oh, so gaily, into your care. That shall be my part; you were pleased with that. I dare say it had never occurred to you, and you thought it very likely, that I should give Edith a hundred or a hundred and fifty a year, so that she would have three hundred and fifty or four hundred pounds of her own a year. Then, indeed, she would be well off; she would be as comfortable as she had ever been.

Suddenly the intolerable sordidness of the discussion struck him. Justly he told himself that it was none of his making, but he could at any rate decline to let it continue. He did not hug himself

over his generosity, for he knew that in his comfortable circumstances it made no real difference whether he gave Edith four hundred a year or not ; merely he could not possibly go on bargaining and disputing. He got up.

"She shall have four hundred a year," he said.

Mrs. Hancock gave a little cry of delight.

"Exactly what I thought that your generosity would insist on giving her," she said. "It is nice to find how well we agree. I was sure we should. And what a delicious sunny morning !"

BOOK II

CHAPTER VI

ELIZABETH ENTERS

ELIZABETH was sitting with her cousin in the garden-house at the end of the croquet-lawn, waiting for the sound of the gong which should announce to her that the motor was round to take her for a drive with Aunt Julia. She had arrived the evening before, after spending a week at Paris with some relations of her mother, and had, at Mrs. Hancock's special desire, breakfasted in her room that morning, this being the correct after-cure for any journey that implied a night in the train or a crossing of the Channel, for had Mrs. Hancock started at midday from Calais and come to her journey's end at Dover she would certainly have had breakfast in her room next day. Elizabeth, as a matter of fact, feeling extremely vigorous when she woke this morning at six, had let herself discreetly out of the house, and much enjoyed a two hours' ramble, returning in time to steal back unobserved to her room, where she ate her breakfast with remarkable heartiness at nine. Soon after, she had come out with Edith, while her aunt read small paragraphs in the paper and saw the cook. The usual schedule for the day had been altered so that Elizabeth might have a good long drive that morning, and

the motor had been ordered for half-past eleven, instead of twelve ; she could then get a good long rest in the afternoon, which should complete the journey-cure inaugurated by breakfasting in bed. But this dislocation of hours had proved too serious to face, and Lind had come out half an hour ago to say that if it suited Miss Elizabeth equally well, the car would come round at twelve—or a few minutes before—as usual.

Elizabeth, as has previously been mentioned, had not looked forward to this summer in England with her aunt, nor had she considered that the well-remembered comfort of the house was an advantage. But on this glittering summer morning, after the dust of trains and the roar of towns, she found herself in a singularly contented, amused and eager frame of mind. There was, for the present, a charm for her in the warm airy house, the exquisitely kept garden, the cheerful serenity of her aunt. As is the way of youth, she delighted in new impressions, and she found that in her two years' absence from England, for she had spent the last summer in the Hills, she had forgotten the aroma of home life. She was recording those new impressions to Edith with remarkable volubility.

" But the most beautiful bath! " she said. " All white tiles, and roses at the window, and silver handles for everything. You should see our Indian bathroom, Edith! There is a horrible little brown shed opening from your bedroom, and a large tin pan in a corner, and if you are lucky a tap for the water. Usually you are unlucky, and there are only tin jugs of water. In the hot weather the first thing you have to do is to look

carefully about to see that a cobra hasn't come to share it with you. Then there are no bells; nobody knows why, but there aren't; and if you want your ayah you shout. If she doesn't want to come she doesn't appear for a quarter of an hour or so, and explains that she didn't hear you shout."

"Then how did she know you shouted?" said Edith brightly.

"That is what you ask her, and she explains at such length that you wish you were dead. Oh, look at the grass—real grass, and there's still dew on it in the shadow. I long to take off my shoes and stockings and walk about on it. May I?"

"Oh, Elizabeth, I think not!" said Edith, slightly alarmed. "Ellis would think it so odd."

"Ellis? Oh, the gardener! He looks like a clergyman, with his side-whiskers. But does it matter much what he thinks? Servants must think such a lot of awful things about us. However, I don't mind. I wanted my bath tremendously this morning, if you'll promise not to tell, because it wasn't exactly what Aunt Julia meant. You see, she thought I was tired, and really I wasn't, so I got up at six and had a delicious ramble. I went on to a quiet common covered with heath, and there was nobody there but a sort of lunatic with a butterfly net, running madly about. He caught his foot in a root of heather and fell flat down at my feet. Of course I howled with laughter."

"Mr. Beaumont," remarked Edith in a tone of inspiration.

"So he told me, because we sat and talked after that. I rather liked him, and he gave me a cigarette."

"A cigarette?" asked Edith. "You don't mean——"

Elizabeth laughed.

"Oh, dear, have I done anything improper?" she asked. "But, anyhow, Ellis wasn't there. He is rather mad, I suppose, isn't he—Mr. Beaumont, I mean? Then while we were sitting there an awful woman came along the path, like a witch in spectacles and the most enormous boots I ever saw."

"Yes?" said Edith, rather apprehensively.

"You would never guess; it was his sister. After I had said she was like a witch. Then she became like a policeman and took him in charge, and I was left smoking my cigarette all alone. The heather smelt so good, better than the cigarette. But everything smells good in England, and reminds you of being clean and happy and cool. But oh, Edith, the Indian smell, the old tired wicked smell! There's always a little bit of it smouldering in my heart like a joss-stick. It's made of incense and hot sand and brown naked people and the filth of the streets and the water-cart; it's savage and eternal, and it reeks of—it doesn't matter. . . . Oh look! Ellis is brushing the grass's hair! Does he comb it as well?"

Edith had but little chance of saying anything at all while these remarkable statements were being poured out by her cousin, but as a matter of fact she was well content to listen. Two years ago, when she had seen Elizabeth last, the latter was a tall, thin, sallow girl, with bursts of high spirits and long intervals of languid silences, and now, with the strength of two years added and the flow of her adolescent womanhood tingling in her veins,

she was a very different creature. Her sallow face was tinged with warm blood, giving her the warm brown complexion that goes with black hair and soft dark eyes; it was as impossible not to feel the kindly effect of her superb vitality as to be insensible to the glow of a frosty-burning fire. She was taut and poised, and full of vigour as a curled spring of steel or the strained wings of a hovering hawk, with the immobile balance that implies so intense an energy. Edith, with a rather unaccustomed flight of imagination, compared herself to a sparrow hopping cheerfully about a lawn, with a nest in the ivy, and an appetite for bread-crumbs. . . . But apparently the sparrow had to chirrup.

"And now I want to hear all sorts of things, Edith," she said. "Tell me about Mr. Beaumont, and the witch, and who lives next door on that side and on that. On that side"—and she pointed with her long brown hand—"I saw a roundabout little woman like a cook, sitting on a bench and reading the paper. Was it the cook? Was she looking in the advertisements for another place, I wondered."

"No; Mrs. Dobbs," said Edith. "She's a friend of mother's and mine."

"Tell me about her. What does she think about?"

It had never occurred to Edith to conjecture what Mrs. Dobbs thought about. You did not connect Mrs. Dobbs with the idea of thought.

"She is very fond of dogs," said Edith.

"I saw them too, curled and brushed. I expect she blacks the ends of their noses like horses' hoofs. I don't call them dogs. But what does

she think about if she lies awake at night? What you think about lying awake is what you really think about. Perhaps she doesn't lie awake. We'll leave her. I don't seem to be interested in her. Who lives there?"

"Mr. Holroyd."

"Whom Aunt Julia said was coming to dinner to-night? She called him Edward—dear Edward, I think—and I am sure she was going to tell me something about him when the old man—Lind, isn't it?—came in to say Mrs. Williams was waiting. So I came out here. Tell me about Edward. Is he a relation? Shall I call him Edward?"

Elizabeth gave one glance at Edith's face, stopped suddenly, and clapped her hands.

"I guess, I guess!" she said. "He isn't a relation, but he is going to be. Edith, my dear, how exciting! I want to hear all about him instantly."

She stopped again.

"I think he must have come out of his front gate in rather a hurry at nine o'clock," she said. "Is he rather tall and clean-shaven, with the look that some people have as if he had washed twice at least that morning? Also, he was whistling Schumann's first Novelette, very loud and quite out of tune. I thought that was rather nice of him, and I whistled too, out of my bedroom window. I had to; I couldn't help it. Of course I didn't let him see me, and he stopped and looked up at the sky to see where it came from. My dear, tell me all about Edward instantly."

Edith gasped in the grip of this genial whirlwind of a girl.

"You are quite right, Elizabeth," she said; "and—and there's nobody like him. I should

have come up to talk to you last night, but mother said you would be tired. How did you guess? It was quick of you."

Elizabeth laughed.

"Not very, dear!" she said. "You looked as if—as if you were in church. And as you weren't, it was obvious you were in love. 'Mr. Holroyd'—you said it like that, like an 'Amen.' My dear, what fun! But I do hope he's good enough for you, and attractive enough. A man has to be so tremendously attractive to make up for being a man at all, with their tufts of hair all over their faces. Of course, I shall never marry at all. I shall—— Oh dear, I've begun to talk about myself, and really I'm not the least interested in myself. Tell me straight off all about Cousin Edward."

This was a task of which Edith was hopelessly incapable. She could no more talk about him than she could talk about religion. Reticent at all times, on this subject her inability to speak amounted almost to dumbness. Her thoughts, unable not to hover round him, were equally unable to alight, to be put into words. The very thought of speaking of him embarrassed her.

"Quick!" said Elizabeth, putting her arm round her.

"I can't! I can't say anything about him except that he is he. You must see for yourself. But oh, Elizabeth, fancy his wanting me! And fancy that when he asked me first I didn't really care. But very soon I began to care, and now I care for him more than anything. If I go on like this I shall begin not to care about anybody else. Oh, there is the gong; that is for the motor.

You must go. But in the interval I think you are a dear. I care for you."

Edith got up, hearing the sonorous Chinese music, but Elizabeth pulled her back to her seat again.

"Surely the motor can wait five minutes," she said. "We are beginning to know each other."

"But mother doesn't like waiting," said Edith.

"Nor does daddy; but he very often has got to. What do you and Cousin Edward talk about? I shall call him Cousin Edward at once, I think, to show him that I know. Or is that forward and tropical of me?"

Lind approached swiftly across the grass.

"Mrs. Hancock is waiting, miss," he said to Elizabeth. "She thinks you can't have heard the gong out here."

Elizabeth gave him a ravishing smile.

"Oh, I heard it beautifully!" she said. "Say I'm coming."

"I think Mrs. Hancock expects you at once, miss," said Lind, quite unsoftened, and continuing to stand firmly there until Elizabeth should move.

Under these circumstances it was impossible to continue anything resembling an intimate conversation, and Elizabeth rose just as Mrs. Hancock herself came out on to the gravel walk below the drawing-room window. She had been waiting at least three minutes—a thing to which she was wholly unaccustomed except when going by train. Then, for the sake of the corner seat facing the engine, she cheerfully waited twenty.

Elizabeth was quite unconscious of any severity of scrutiny on the part of her aunt as she ran

across the lawn and jumped over a flower-bed, nor did she detect the slightest intention of sarcasm in Mrs. Hancock's greeting.

"Are you nearly ready, Elizabeth?" she asked. "If so the car has been waiting some time."

"I'm quite ready, Aunt Julia," she said, "and I am so looking forward to my drive."

The usual detailed discussion was gone through with Denton as to their exact route, and Mrs. Hancock put her feet up on the footstool that had been bought for the journey to Bath.

"Now we're off," she said; "and if you would put down your window two more holes, dear, or perhaps three, we shall be quite comfortable. You look quite rested; that's what comes of stopping in your room for breakfast. And if you get a good long rest again this afternoon, while Edith and I are out, I've no doubt you'll be quite brisk this evening. Mr. Holroyd is coming to dinner, and you'll hear him play. That will be quite a treat for you as you are so fond of music. And now I want to tell you——"

Elizabeth interrupted her aunt. To this also she was unaccustomed.

"I think I know," she said. "Do you mean about Mr. Holroyd? Edith told me. But she didn't seem able to describe him at all. Do tell me about him! Is he good enough for her? I think she's a dear!"

"Edward is a young man in a thousand," began Mrs. Hancock.

"Yes; but is he the right young man in a thousand? I hope he's rich too, though of course that doesn't matter so much for Edith. Aunt Julia, what a lovely car! May I drive it some

day? Would your chauffeur lend me his cap and coat? I used often to drive daddy, till one day when I went into a ditch. It was so funny; one door was jammed, of course, against the side of the ditch and we couldn't open the other. Mamma was inside. We thought we should have to feed her through the window. But daddy said afterwards that it wasn't entirely my fault. May I drive now? Or perhaps I had better learn about the car first. And now about Cousin Edward?"

Mrs. Hancock had received several shocks during this hurricane speech, and she had to collect herself a little before she could reply. But before she could reply Elizabeth was away again.

"Oh, here we are on that nice heath!" she said. "It did smell so good! Oh, Aunt Julia, I think I had better confess! I couldn't stop in bed this morning, though it was nice of you to want me to get rested, and I went for a walk about six."

"My dear! All alone?"

"Some of the time. I met a man whom I thought was a lunatic with a butterfly net, but Edith says it was Mr. Beaumont. He fell down, so we talked. And his sister came out of a wood! Oh, I believe that is he again, coming along the road towards us now!"

"But, my dear, what odd conduct on your part!"

"Was it? It seemed the only thing to do. Had I better bow to him, Aunt Julia?"

Mrs. Hancock felt slightly bewildered by so puzzling a question of etiquette as that involved by a girl conversing with a total stranger—particularly when that stranger turned out to be Mr.

Beaumont—at six o'clock in the morning. Prudence prevailed.

"We will both look at the view out of the side-window," she said, and Mr. Beaumont encountered a pair of profiles.

But Mr. Beaumont and his butterfly net being left behind, Mrs. Hancock thought well to take advantage of the opportunity for a few general remarks. Already she had been kept waiting, been interrupted, and been faced with this problem arising from quite unheard-of conduct on Elizabeth's part. And as a gentian thrusts blossoms through the snow, so at the base of her cordiality of tone lay a frozen rigidity. As her custom was, when she wanted to say something of the correcting and improving nature, she laid her hand softly—then squeezed—on Elizabeth's. This was symbolical of the affectionate nature of her intention.

"I can't tell you, dear Elizabeth," she said, "how I have been looking forward to your coming here, and I am quite certain we shall have the happiest summer together. And I hope you won't find the manners and customs expected of a young lady in England very strange, though I know they are so different to what is quite right and proper in India, with all its deserts and black people. Most interesting it all must be, and I am greatly looking forward to hearing about it all, and I'm sure when you tell me I shall want to go to India myself. But here, for instance, dear Edith would never dream of taking a walk at six o'clock in the morning all alone, when there might be all kinds of people about, or talking to strangers, or thinking even of driving a motor-car. My dear,

if you would reach down that tube and blow through it and then say, 'To the right, please, Denton,' he will take us a very pleasant round, and we shall get back ten minutes before lunch and have time to rest and cool. Had we started a few minutes sooner, when the car came round, we should have had time to go a long round, past a very pretty mill which I wanted to show you. As it is, we will take a shorter round."

There was all Mrs. Hancock's quiet masterfulness in these agreeable remarks, all the leaden imperturbability which formed so large a factor in the phenomenon of her getting her own way in her own manner, and of everybody else doing, in the long run, what she wished, until they were reduced to the state of abject vassalage in which her immediate circle found themselves. The effect it produced on Elizabeth, though not complete, was material.

"I'm afraid that it was my fault we didn't start punctually, Aunt Julia," she said. "But couldn't we go round by the mill all the same and be a little late for lunch?"

Mrs. Hancock laughed.

"And make other people unpunctual as well?" she said. "No, my dear; when anybody has been unpunctual—I am never unpunctual myself—my rule is to get back to punctuality as soon as possible and start fair again. We will go to the mill another day, for I hope we shall have plenty of drives together. About Mr. Beaumont, I hardly know what to do. If only, you naughty girl, you had not got up but stayed quietly in bed, as I meant you to do, it would never have happened. I think the best plan will be for me to ask him to

lunch with us and then introduce you quite fresh, so that he will see that we all mean to forget about your meeting on the heath. Look, here are the golf links! Very likely we shall see Mr. Martin playing. He is our clergyman, and we are most lucky to have him. Yes, upon my word, there he is! Now he sees my car and is waving his cap! Well, that was a coincidence, meeting him, for now you will recognize him again when you see him in his surplice and hood in church to-morrow morning. Dear me, it is the first Sunday in the month, and there will be the Communion after Morning Service. Mr. Martin never calls it Matins; he says that is a Roman Catholic name. How quickly the Sundays come round!"

Elizabeth looked out of the window at the celebrated Mr. Martin, and saw that here was an opportunity for saying what she felt she must say to her aunt before Sunday morning. The talk she had had with her father on the reality of religious beliefs to her had been renewed before she left India, and, with his consent, she had made up her mind not to go to church while the reason for so doing remained inconclusive to her. To attend public worship seemed to her a symbolical act, an outward sign of something that, in truth, was non-existent. . . . It was like a red Socialist joining in the National Anthem. But she had promised him—and, indeed, the promise was one with the desire of her heart—to pray, not to let neglect cement her want of conviction.

"Aunt Julia," she said, "I want to tell you something. It is that I don't want to go to church. It—it doesn't mean anything to me. Oh, I'm afraid you are shocked!"

It seemed a justifiable apprehension.

"Elizabeth!" said Mrs. Hancock. "How can you say such wicked things?"

This roused the girl.

"They are not wicked!" she said hotly. "It is very cruel of you to say so. I had a long talk, two talks, with daddy about it. He agrees with me. He was very sorry, but he agrees."

It is hard to convey exactly the impression made on Mrs. Hancock's mind. If Elizabeth had confessed to a systematic course of burglary or murder she would not have been more shocked, nor would she have been more shocked if her niece had announced her intention of appearing at dinner without shoes and stockings. The conventional outrage, in fact, was about as distressing to her as the moral one. She knew, of course, perfectly well that even in well-regulated Heathmoor certain most respectable inhabitants, who often sat at her table, were accustomed to spend Sunday morning on the golf-links instead of at public worship, but she never for a moment thought of classing them with Elizabeth. She could not have explained that; it was merely matter of common knowledge that grown-up men did not seem to need to go to church so much. Similarly it was right for them to smoke strong cigars after dinner, whereas the fact that Elizabeth had consumed one of Mr. Beaumont's cigarettes, had she been cognizant of that appalling occurrence, would have seemed to her an almost inconceivable breach of decency. Girls went to church, and did not smoke; here was the statement of two very simple fundamental things.

"I hardly know what to say to you," she said.

"Talking to Mr. Beaumont is nothing to this. I must ask you to be silent for a little while, Elizabeth, while I collect my thoughts, and on our first drive too, which I hoped we should enjoy so much, although your being late made it impossible for us to go round by the mill as I had planned."

The poor lady's pleasure was quite spoiled, and not being accustomed to arrange her thoughts in any order, except when she was forming careful plans for her own comfort, she found the collection of them, which she desired, difficult of attainment. But very quickly she began to see that her own comfort was seriously involved, and that gave her a starting-point. It would be known by now throughout Heathmoor that her niece from India had come to stay with her for the summer, and it would be seen that no niece sat with her in the pew just below the pulpit. Almost all the seats in the church faced eastwards; this, with one or two others, ran at right angles to them, and was thus in full view of the congregation. It followed that unless she explained Elizabeth's absence, Sunday by Sunday, when there was always a general chat—except on the first Sunday of the month—at the gate into the churchyard, by a cold or some other non-existent complaint (and this was really not to be thought of), her circle of friends would necessarily come to the most shocking conclusion as to Elizabeth's non-appearance. Certainly Mr. Martin would notice it, and it would be his duty to inquire into it. That would be most uncomfortable, and if inquiries were made of her she could not imagine herself giving either the real reason or a false one. No doubt if

Mr. Martin talked to Elizabeth he could soon awake in her that sense of religious security, of soothed, confident trust—a trust as complete as that with which any sane person awaited the rising of the sun in the morning, which to Mrs. Hancock connoted Christianity, but that he should talk to her implied that he must know what ailed her. And in any case the rest of Heathmoor would notice Elizabeth's absence from church. . . . It was all very dreadful and puzzling, and was no doubt the result of a prolonged sojourn in India, where heathens, in spite of all those missions to which she did not subscribe, were still in such numerical preponderance. But the cause of Elizabeth's proposed absence did not in reality so greatly trouble her. What spoiled her pleasure, in any case, was the uncomfortableness of the situation if Elizabeth was seen to be consistently absent from the eleven o'clock service.

Then the light began to break, and conventional arguments flocked to the assistance of her beleaguered conventionality.

"I am so shocked and distressed, dear," she said, "though you will tell me, I dare say, that there is little good in that, and on this lovely morning, too. But of the reason for your not going to church I will not speak now. I am thinking of the effect. Every one knows that you are here with me, and, unless I am to say you are unwell every Sunday morning, what am I to say? And, indeed, I could not bring myself to say you are unwell, and keep on repeating it. Of course we all say, 'Not at home,' when it is not convenient to receive callers, but on a subject like this it would be out of the question. There

is Mr. Beaumont again ; we seem always to be meeting him. And the servants, too. Lind and Denton and Filson will all certainly know you don't go to church, and Mrs. Williams, who can't go, though I am sure she would if her duties allowed her to, will be certain to hear you moving about from the kitchen. They will talk among themselves and say how odd it is. It will offend them, dear, and you know what is said about giving offence. I am sure you did not think of that "— Mrs. Hancock had only just thought of it—" or consider what effect your absence would have. I assure you that often and often I have felt inclined not to go on Sunday morning, and should much prefer, when it is wet, to read the psalms and lessons at home. Even then Lind and Filson and the others would know that it was only the weather that prevented me, and they would see the prayer-books and Bibles lying about."

Elizabeth again interrupted.

" You needn't say any more, Aunt Julia," she said. " Certainly I will go to church on Sunday. It seems to me that it would be an offence against your hospitality for me to refuse. It is part of the routine, is it not, a rule of the house? On those grounds I will go. Will that satisfy you? "

Mrs. Hancock found that all that had " shocked and distressed her " was sensibly ameliorated. The feelings of Lind and Filson would be spared, and the chat at the churchyard gate would be as cheerful as usual. She beamed on her niece.

" I knew you would see it in the right light, if it was put to you," she said. " And, with regard to your reasons for not wanting to go,

would you like to talk to Mr. Martin about it? He is so wise. Anyhow, you will hear him preach, and I cannot imagine any one hearing Mr. Martin preach without feeling the absolute truth of what he says. But that we will talk of another time. Dear me, we are back at the golf links again; we have made a loop, you see. And if that isn't Mr. Martin going into the club-house. Fancy seeing him twice in a morning! Well, we have had a nice drive, after all. And when we get in you must remind me to give you a volume of sermons by your grandfather, in which he tells about his own doubts when he was a young man, and how he fought and overcame them. It is all so beautifully put, and after that he never had any more doubts at all. And we shall get back ten minutes before luncheon-time, which is just what I like to do."

Edward was the only guest that evening, and during dinner Elizabeth found herself observing him somewhat closely, and coming to no conclusions whatever about him. Certainly he was good-looking, he was well-bred and quiet of voice, but she found nothing in him to distinguish him from the host, nothing that to her could account for the lighting up of Edith's face when she looked at him. He had a couple of Stock Exchange jokes to repeat, one of which made Mrs. Hancock call him naughty, and the subjects of perennial interest, such as the weather and the train-service—it appeared that the directors were going to cut off the vexing three minutes in the evening train from town—took their turns with the hardy annuals, such as the forthcoming croquet tournament and the ripening strawberry

crop. New plays going on in town, the criticisms of which Mrs. Hancock had read in the *Morning Post* followed, and the much-debated action of the Censor in refusing to license the Biblical drama called "David" infused a tinge of extra vividness in discussion, and Mrs. Hancock exhibited considerable ingenuity in avoiding the word "Bathsheba."

"Mr. Beaumont was talking to me about it the other day," she said, "and he said his cousin, who is in the Lord Chamberlain's office, told him that there was no question about its having the licence refused. There were episodes quite unfit for the stage."

Everybody looked regretfully at the dessert.

"I am very glad it was stopped," continued Mrs. Hancock. "I feel so uncomfortable at the theatre if I think there is something coming which isn't *quite*——"

"But we have it all read in the lessons in church, don't we, Aunt Julia?" asked Elizabeth.

"Yes, my dear; but what is suitable to read is often not suitable for the stage. For my part, even if they do give 'Parsifal' in town, I shall not think of going to it."

"But that is not quite parallel to David and Bathsheba," said Elizabeth straight out. Lind was at her elbow, too, with the savoury.

"And do come in to-morrow afternoon, Edward," said Mrs. Hancock, with extraordinary presence of mind, "and play these two young ladies at croquet."

Smoking, of course, was not allowed in Mrs. Hancock's drawing-room, and Edward was firmly shut into the dining-room, with the injunction not

to stop there long. No word was said regarding Elizabeth's awful lapse, nor did any silence reproach her. The one swift change of subject at the moment of the crisis had called sufficient attention to it. The table with patience cards was set ready, and Mrs. Hancock, over her coffee, got instantly occupied and superficially absorbed in her game. Before long Edward, as commanded, reunited himself.

"And now give us our usual treat, dear Edward," said Mrs. Hancock, building busily from the king downwards in alternate colours, "and play us something. That beautiful piece by Schumann now, where it keeps coming in again."

From this indication Edward was quick enough to conjecture the first of the Noveletten, and opened the Steinway grand, covered with a piece of Italian embroidery on which stood a lamp, two vases of flowers, and four photograph frames. Edith moved round to the other side of the card-table, where she could see the player; Elizabeth, with a flash of delighted anticipation, shifted round in her chair and put down the evening paper. She adored the piece "which kept coming in again," and, knowing it well herself, felt the musician's intense pleasure at the idea of hearing what somebody else thought about it. Somewhat to her surprise, Edward put the music in front of him; more to her surprise, he did not show the slightest intention of moving the lamp, the vase of flowers, or the photograph frames.

Then he began with the loud pedal down, as the composer ordered, and Elizabeth listened amazed to an awful, a conscientious, a correct performance. Never were there so many right

notes played with so graceless a result ; no one could have imagined there was so much wood in the whole human system as Edward contrived to concentrate into his ten fingers, those fingers which, Elizabeth noticed, looked so slender and athletic, and for all purposes of striking notes properly were as efficient as a row of wooden pegs. He made the piano bellow, he made it shriek, he made it rattle ; and when he played with less force he made it emit squeaks and little hollow gasps. As for phrasing, there was of course none at all ; each chord was played as written, each sequence that made up the phrase played with laborious and precise punctuality. To any one of musical mind the result was of the most excruciating nature, or would have been had not the entire performance been so extremely funny. As a parody of how some quite accomplished but unsympathetic pianist performed the Novelette it was beyond all praise. Elizabeth rocked with noiseless laughter. So much for the sound, and then Elizabeth, looking at his face in the twilight of the shaded lamp, saw that in it was all that his hands lacked. The features that at dinner, when she somewhat studied him, had appeared so meaninglessly good-looking, were irradiated, transfigured ; he heard all that his fingers could not make others hear, his eyes saw and danced with seeing, all the abounding grace and colour that lay in the melodies his hands were incapable of rendering. Then, in three inflexible leaps, as if a wooden marionette jumping down from platform to platform of rock, the piece came to an end.

Edith gave a great sigh.

"Oh, it's splendid!" she said.

Mrs. Hancock triumphantly put the knave of hearts on to the queen of clubs.

"Thank you, Edward!" she said. "I like it where it comes in again. There! I believe it's going to come out!"

He faced round on his music-stool to receive their compliments, his eyes still glowing, and met Elizabeth's look. Perception flashed between the two, wordless and infallible. He knew for certain that she knew, knew all the exultant music meant to him, knew all the entire incompetence of his rendering. He got up and went to her.

"You play, don't you?" he said, speaking rather low. "Can't you take the taste of that out of our mouths?"

Elizabeth almost laughed for pleasure at the complete understanding so instantaneously established between them.

"Yes. What shall I play?" she asked.

"If only you happened to know that first Novelette," he said.

She raised her eyebrows.

"Shall I really?" she said. "I think I know it."

"And won't you give us that other delicious one?" said Mrs. Hancock, plastering the cards down. "The one I like next best, which is sad in the middle."

Elizabeth did not answer, but went straight over to the piano. He had shut the book from which he played, and she did not open it, for, though she suspected she might not be note-perfect, she intended to play, not to practise. Mrs. Hancock, absorbed in the patience that really was "coming

out," did not notice that she had no reply to her question, and the click of her triumphant sequence of cards continued. Edith, who had not heard what had passed between the two, remembered that Elizabeth was fond of music, but felt surprised and slightly nervous at the thought that she should think of playing when the echoes of that reverberating performance still lingered in the air. But neither Elizabeth nor Edward seemed to heed her.

Elizabeth sat down, then half-rose again, and gave a twirl to the music-stool. Then she paused for a moment, with her hands before her face, and without any preliminary excursions, plunged straight into the first Novelette again. And all that had been in Edward's brain, all that could not communicate itself to his hands, streamed from her firm, soft finger-tips. The images imprisoned in his brain broke out and peopled the room with colour and with fire. Banners waved, and a throng of laughing youths passed, jewel-decked, in wonderful processions down a street of noble palaces. At every corner fresh members joined them, for on this joyful morning the whole world of those spirit-presences kept festival, and whether they sang or not, or whether the marching melody was but the sound of joy, he knew not. . . . Innumerable as the laughter of the sea they glittered along, until by some wonderful transformation they were the waves on a spring morning, and over them a song floated. . . . Or were they a field of daffodils, and over them the scent of their blossoming hovered? From the sunlight they passed into a clear blue shadow, and out of it, as out of waters, came the strain. . . . From

shadow into sunlight again they passed, and from sunlight into waves with singing sea-birds flashing white-winged over them. Once more sun and banners, and in the sunlight a fountain of water aspired. . . . Where under his hands the wooden doll had tumbled from rock to rock, bouquets of rainbowed water fell from basin to basin of crystal. . . . And that was the first Novelette.

Mrs. Hancock had noticed the change of performer, though not at first, for it only occurred to her that Edward was playing the same piece over again. But it struck her very soon that he was not "keeping the time" with such precision as usual, and the moment afterwards that this was altogether different from the tune that kept coming in again, as rendered before. Then, looking up, she saw it was Elizabeth at the piano, and there followed a couple of obviously wrong notes. How foolish and forward of this girl to play after Edward, to play his piece, too, and make mistakes in it. And when the tune came in again she didn't put half the force into it that Edward did. Certainly she had not Edward's "touch," nor his masculine power, that stamped out the time with such vigour.

Her natural geniality prevented her saying or even hinting at any of these things, and she was extremely encouraging.

"Thank you, Elizabeth!" she said. "What a coincidence that you should be learning one of Edward's tunes. Now you *have* heard it played, haven't you? I am sure you will get it right in time. You must play it to Edward again next week, when you have practised, and he will see how you have got on."

"Ah, do play it again to me next week," said he, "or before next week."

"And now, Edward," said Mrs. Hancock, "do let us have the tune that gets sad in the middle."

He turned to her, with face that music still vivified.

"After that all my tunes would be sad," he said—"beginning, middle, and end. But won't Miss Fanshawe play again?"

Mrs. Hancock thought that charming of him; it was so tactful to make Elizabeth think she had played well; poor Elizabeth, with her wrong notes that any one with an ear could detect. As a matter of fact she did not care one particle who played or if anybody played, so long as her patience came out. She perceived nothing of the situation, guessed nothing about the fire from the girl's fingers which tingled in his brain.

But Edith saw more; she saw, at any rate, that something in Elizabeth's playing had enormously pleased and excited her lover. And he had said that it was surely she herself who lay behind melody, she whom he sought. She went to Elizabeth and gently pushed her back on to the music-stool.

"Do play again, dear!" she said. "It gives us such pleasure."

Elizabeth, as her father knew, was conscious of little else than her "German Johnnies," when there was singing in her brain, and she sat down at once.

"Do you know this?" she said. "Quite short."

She touched the keys once and then again, as if to test the lightness of her fingers, and then broke

into the Twelfth Etude of Chopin, letting the piano whisper—a privilege so seldom accorded to that belaboured instrument. Even Mrs. Hancock responded to it, and laid down her cards and spoke.

"What a delicious tune, my dear," she said. "Tum-ti-ti ; tum-ti-ti !"

The tune was still hovering and poised. Elizabeth put her hands firmly down on a suspension and stopped.

"But what an abrupt end !" said Mrs. Hancock.

"Yes," said Elizabeth, turning round on the stool.

When Mrs. Hancock had had enough patience and conversation she secretly rang an electric bell which was fixed to the underside of her card-table, upon which Lind brought in a tray of glasses and soda-water, which was rightly regarded by her guests as a stirrup-cup. This signal occurred rather earlier than usual to-night, for it was likely that the two lovers would wish to say a few words to each other in the library before parting. This was made completely easy for them by Mrs. Hancock's suggestion that Edith would find Edward's hat and coat for him, as Lind no doubt had gone to bed—he had left the soda-water tray about three minutes before—and the two went out together.

The words of parting were short, and Edward, still tingling with music, still inflamed by that lambent fire, went back to his house. In musical matters, despite his own incompetence in matter of performance, he had an excellent judgment, and he knew that he had been listening that night

to the real thing. There was no question as to the quality of Elizabeth's playing; she had authority, without which the most agile execution is no more than a mere facility of finger, acquirable like the nimble manœuvres of a conjurer, and in itself as devoid of artistic merit. That magic, like his, is a matter of mere manipulation, and no more constitutes a pianist than does the power of pronouncing words without stammer or stumbling constitute an actor. But behind Elizabeth's playing sat the master, who understood by virtue of perception the meaning of music, and by virtue of hands co-ordinated with that burning perception, could interpret. And, above all, he felt that in music she spoke his language, uttered the idioms he understood but could not give voice to. Her soul and his were natives of the same melodious country; not foreigners to each other.

He told himself, and honestly believed it, that there was no more than this—as if this was not enough—in the hour he had spent in Mrs. Hancock's drawing-room. He was not even sure whether he liked Elizabeth or not; certainly she was as different as might well be from the type of marriageable maidenhood which had so greatly and so sanely attracted him that he rejoiced to know that his future life would be intimately and entirely bound up in hers. All through dinner Elizabeth had *meant* nothing at all to him, and he had noted, rather than admired, her vitality, for certainly she was like a light brought into a dusky room, dispersing the shadows that completely and somnolently brooded in the corners, and restoring colour to mere grey outlines. But he was not very sure that he desired or appre-

ciated this unusual illumination ; they had all of them got on very nicely in the dark, where if you dozed a little, there was not much probability of being detected, and of late he had sat with chair close to Edith's, so to speak, and listened with tenderness to Mrs. Hancock talking on in her sleep. Into this had Elizabeth come with her vivid bull's-eye lantern, which got in one's eyes a little, and was slightly disconcerting.

So had it been until she played, and at that moment and in that regard he found her simply and utterly adorable ; and he poured out his homage for her as he would have done for some splendid Brunnhilde awaking and hailing the sun. And he knew the nature of the homage he brought, so he as yet confidently told himself, a homage as sexless and impersonal as that which prompts the presentation of wreaths to elderly and perspiring conductors at the close of an act. It needed not a Brunnhilde to evoke that, for it was merely the tribute to artistic interpretation manifested by man or woman, and responded to by those who could appreciate. Mrs. Hancock's deplorable ejaculation of "Tum-ti-ti ; tum-ti-ti" was of the same nature. It was not a tribute to Elizabeth, nor was his abandonment of himself to her spell, or, at the most, it was a tribute to her fingers, for the music that flowed from them. But how he would have worshipped that gift in another ; if only it had been Edith who played !

He had sat himself down in the broad window-seat of his drawing-room, which looked out into the garden and trees that a fortnight before had stood made of ebony and ivory in the blaze of the May moonlight, on the night when the house next

door had been empty. To-night it was tenanted, tenanted by the girl who, within a few months, would come across so short a space of lawn and make her home with him, tenanted also by the dark, vivid presence of her who had made music to them. In his drawing-room where he sat, empty and blazing with electric light, for some unaccounted impulse had made him turn on all the switches, stood his big black piano, with inviolate top, standing open. How would Elizabeth awake the soul in it, even as Siegfried had by his kiss awakened Brunnhilde, by the magic of her comprehending fingers! Almost he could see her there, with her profile, a little defiant, a little mutinous, cut, cameo-wise, against the dark grey of his walls, with her eye kindling as she listened to the music in her brain, which flowed like some virile, tumultuous heart-beat out of her fingers. How well she understood the tramp and colour of that Novelette!—yet he knew he understood it quite as well himself—how unerringly her fingers marshalled and painted it! In her was the secret, the initiation, and—oh, how much it meant!—in her also was the mysterious power of communication. She was not one of those incomplete souls who are born dumb, as so many were. She could speak. . . . Others were born empty, and so their power of speech was but a bottle of senseless sounds, of flat wooden phrases. . . . And then, with a shock of surprise to himself, he became aware that he was thinking no longer about the music which Elizabeth made, but Elizabeth who made it.

CHAPTER VII

THE INTERMEZZO

BUSINESS on the Stock Exchange had been, as was not uncommon, somewhat slack during this month of June, and Edward found it easy to get down to Heathmoor by the train that arrived soon after five instead of that which started an hour later. It was natural for him, after getting rid of the habiliments of town, to come round next door, where he would find Mrs. Hancock and Edith ready to give him a slightly belated cup of tea in the garden-house that adjoined the croquet-lawn. As a rule Elizabeth was not there, but her whereabouts was indicated by the sound of the piano, for she was practising with the energy of the enthusiast, and found this hour, when the house was empty and she could escape from the sense of disturbing or being disturbed, the most congenial time in which to make as much noise as she chose, or to practise a particular bar in endless repetition. Mrs. Hancock continued to believe—and to reiterate—that Edward was the *maestro* and that Elizabeth followed, faint but pursuing, in the wake of his victorious fingers, and she often asked him how he thought she was getting on. He frequently dined there, and, with the regularity that characterized her, she insisted on his playing one or

more of his "pieces" when he had smoked the cigarette that detained him in the dining-room. And on these occasions his eye was wont to seek Elizabeth's in tacit apology, and though no word had passed between them on the subject the situation was quite clear to them both. More than once he had attempted to convince Mrs. Hancock that while he could only strum abominably her niece played, and she, perfectly incredulous, thought it was nice of him to be so modest himself and to encourage Elizabeth. So, protest being utterly useless, he played, with Elizabeth in his confidence. But the sense of this secret between them—for Edith shared her mother's belief in the *maestro*—gave him a peculiar and, so he still told himself, an inexplicable satisfaction. With that knowledge he enjoyed, rather than otherwise, his own long-drawn murders of the classical authors, and he completely understood the dimpling smile that fluttered, light-winged, over Elizabeth's face as he performed his ruthless deeds.

During this last fortnight life at Arundel had pursued, to all outward appearance, the regulated and emotionless course that characterized existence at Heathmoor. The time of strawberries had come, and therefore also the time of garden parties; and a quarter of an hour after the arrival of the evening train from town the well-laid roads were thick with hurrying flannelled figures, carrying lawn-tennis racquets or croquet mallets, for this latter game was taken with extreme seriousness, and nobody among the regular players would have dreamed of trusting to a mallet of the house. Elizabeth naturally had her share in these invitations, and it was a source of never-ending surprise

to see young and athletically limbed men, of the same species apparently as those who in India spent their leisure in polo and pig-sticking, pursuing their laborious way through hoop after hoop, and talking about the game afterwards with greater gusto and minuteness than if they had been tiger-shooting. Chief amongst those heroes of the lawn was Edward, but he, as she did him the justice to observe, preserved the reticence of the accustomed conqueror and sat silent when the Vicar and Mr. Dale "lived their triumphs o'er again." Elizabeth felt that to be like him, but she made the admission grudgingly.

The fact that she grudged him such credit was symptomatic of her feelings towards him, and in especial of those feelings which she did not admit. Though she would honestly have denied it, she was fighting him. Again and again, not knowing why, she assured herself that he was a very ordinary young man, that Edith must be blind, so to speak, to see anything in him. Except in one point, she told herself that there was nothing there, that a lanky frame—it was beyond her power to deny his inches—crowned by a vacant face, was the harbourage of an insignificant soul. He spent his day among the money-bags, his evening on the croquet-lawn, and found that sufficient for him. He was not nearly worthy of Edith or of Edith's inexplicable adoration; he was not even, so he appeared to Elizabeth's eye, in love with her, which would have been a foundation for worthiness. He seemed indulgent of her, kind to her, sometimes a little impatient of her. There Elizabeth did not wholly acquit her cousin of blame; she set him, willy-nilly, on a pedestal, and those on pedestals,

for he did not deprecate the plinth, are bound to stoop. But he should have stepped down from the pedestal, he should not have consented to be edified into the statuesque ; here was the ground of Elizabeth's censure of him. In fine, she reminded herself twenty times a day of some reason for belittling to her own mind her cousin's betrothed, and concealed from herself that she belittled him. That was an affair of her instinct, and instinctively she knew, though she whispered it not to herself, why she did it, for she feared to give rein to her liking for him.

One exception she made in this policy of self-defence; in one thing she gave him his due, for she never attempted to deny or belittle the validity of his musical passion. It was a fingerless passion, so to speak; between his brain and his hands there seemed to be a total want of co-ordination; he was paralytic, but she could not doubt the intensity of his perception. He was but an alphabet-babbler when he tried to communicate, but when she played to him she knew by a glance at his face whether she did ill or well. Thus, ironically, Mrs. Hancock's judgment of him as *maestro* and Elizabeth as pupil was strangely correct, and the girl did not attempt to conceal from herself that it was of him and his opinion that she thought, when she practised, with a greater diligence and fire than had ever been hers before, the music which he understood and loved so discerningly. Day by day she slaved exultingly at the piano, and the thought that he would appreciate her progress became an inspiration to her. But at present this reverence for his gift was like an insoluble lump in the cup of her cold indiffer-

ence towards him; it neither sweetened nor embittered the beverage. But certainly through him she was begininng to get closer every day to the ineffable spring and spirit from which that bewildering beauty of sound is poured forth, that "dweller in the innermost," one glance from whom sends the beholder mad with melody.

On one afternoon at the end of the month, graciously exempt from garden-parties, Elizabeth was alone in the house, for the hour after lunch had been too hot for Mrs. Hancock's drive, and the whole curriculum of the day had been upset, tea having taken place at the very unusual hour of half-past four, so that she might enjoy a cooler progress between that time and dinner—a dislocation of affairs that had not occurred since the year before last. But the heat was so intense that she really hardly cared at all whether Denton and Lind thought it odd or not, and punctually at five she had set out with Edith, leaving a message with Lind that if Mr. Holroyd came round he was to be told that they were out, but would be back by half-past six. Thus—here Denton became concerned—they would have time to go round by the mill, proceeding very slowly where the road had been newly mended, and so forth. But if—here Lind was attentive again—Mr. Holroyd came by the six o'clock train he might be offered a whisky and soda and asked to wait, but if by the five o'clock train the original message should be delivered. Then Filson brought out a light dust-cloak and the heavier blue one was taken out; then it was put back again in case the evening got chilly. They passed over the bridge by the station the moment after the five o'clock train got

in, and Edith thought she saw Edward stepping out of it, but she was not sure. But Edward saw the motor and its passengers without any doubt whatever.

He went straight to his house and out into the garden. There from the open French windows of the house next door the piano was plainly audible. Elizabeth was playing the first of the Brahms' intermezzi, and the air sang like a bed of breeze-stirred flowers. . . . In less than a minute he had rung the bell, and in answer to Lind's message had said he would come in and wait. In spite of the fact that the offer of whisky and soda applied only to the six o'clock train Lind suggested it. But Edward said he wanted nothing, and, turning the handle of the drawing-room door very softly, he entered.

Elizabeth, utterly intent on her music, heard nothing of his coming, and he sat down in a chair close to the door, knowing that he was doing a rude and an ill-bred thing, knowing, too, in his heart that he was doing worse than that, for he was definitely indulging infidelity, even though the infidelity was, in fact, no more than listening to the girl's playing. But he knew quite well why he listened, and it was not for the sake of the music alone; it was to allow himself, unseen and unsuspected—for there was in this questionable conduct something of the self-effacing quality of love—to see incarnated the dreams from which he had roused himself when a month ago he engaged himself to Edith. For years of his youth he had cherished this unrealized vision, fondling it in his dreams ; now, when too early he had told himself that the time for dreaming was done and he must awake to the average humdrum satisfaction of

domesticity with a delightful partner, the dream incarnate had walked into his waking hours.

The sound of what she played had been the magnet which drew him here, but now that he had come he was scarcely conscious of her music, which throughout this month had been that which attracted him to her. Now it was as if that had done its work, for it had brought his heart to her, and Nature, or the law of attraction, threw it aside like a discarded instrument, and for the first moments that he sat here he scarcely heard the sweetness of the melody. Then it seemed to him that the strong and tender tune was Elizabeth's soul made audible; she played, thinking she was alone, as she had never played before. She seemed to reveal herself. . . . And then it struck him that he had done, and was doing, what was equivalent to looking through a keyhole at somebody who thought she was alone. Shame awoke in him for that, but shame passed and was swallowed up in his intense consciousness of her, of Elizabeth and the tune that was Elizabeth herself.

She finished, and sat still for a moment with her fingers still resting on the last chord. Then she gave a long sigh, and, turning round, saw him.

"Cousin Edward!" she said, almost incredulously, feeling exactly what just now he had felt, namely, that he had been looking through a keyhole at her.

He got up, only dimly conscious of the rebuke in her voice.

"I came in after you had begun that intermezzo," he said, "and I didn't want to disturb you. I know how you hate an interruption. I—"

He paused a moment, dead to all else except the fact of her.

"I never heard you play like that before," he said. "It was you."

She still looked troubled.

"I don't think you should have done that," she said. "Didn't Lind tell you that Aunt Julia and Edith were out?"

"Yes. If you think I oughtn't to have come in I am sorry. But I can't help rejoicing that I have heard you play like that."

Suddenly it seemed to Elizabeth that it was ridiculous of her to object to what he had done. She had often played to him alone before, and what difference did it make if on this occasion she did not know of his presence? But her reason was at variance with her instinct.

She smiled at him.

"It is nothing," she said; "I was absurd to mind. I am glad you thought I played it well. Have you had tea? Shall we go into the garden?"

He saw his danger slipping away from him; he had but to make a commonplace reply and it would be past. But he saw his dream, that had become incarnate, slipping away from him also, and at the moment that meant everything in the world to him. He was reckless, on fire, and came close to her and stammered a little when he spoke.

"For the last fortnight," he said, "I have thought of nothing else but you——"

Loyalty and cowardice mixed caused him to stop. He saw amazement and utter surprise flood Elizabeth's face; he saw also, faint as the reflection of far-away lightning, something that responded to him, something that leaped towards

him instead of recoiling from him. But all the rest of her was lost in pure bewilderment, which only wanted to get rid of him. She did not even answer him, but, with finger and following eye, pointed to the door.

"I beg your pardon!" he said quickly.

"Please go!" said the girl.

She sat down on the music-stool which she had so lately left, and while waiting for her brain to work again struck a random note or two. As far as she felt anything she felt surprise. Then in a flash came indignation that, while he was but a month old in his engagement to Edith, he should speak thus to her. And following instantly on that, like some burglar violently breaking into her mind, came the unbidden thought, "He cares for me."

She tried to eject it; she called for help, so to speak, but the burglar contemplated her quite calmly, as if he had a right to be there. He seemed to speak to her, to say, "You will have to get used to me." In turn she looked at him and ceased calling for help. Something inside her—that, without doubt, which Edward had seen faintly behind her first amazement and surprise—seemed to recognize, to smile at him. . . . And Elizabeth ceased from being surprised at Edward and became surprised at herself. But what was to be done? Beyond all doubt the answer was clear. There was nothing to be done at all; at any rate, there was nothing for her to do. It was ludicrous to contemplate telling Aunt Julia; it would not have been more ludicrous to tell Edith. Nobody must know; nobody must ever so faintly conjecture what had happened. Edward was going to marry Edith on the eighth of October,

and there were to be six bridesmaids, of whom she herself was to be one.

Elizabeth's surprise at herself waxed and grew, and her surprise was due to the fact that she was not in the least shocked. She made one unsuccessful attempt to tell herself that Edward had not meant what he said, but she swiftly gave that up, being quite aware that he meant much more than he had said. His trembling voice, his fingers that plaited themselves together, told her that. He was quite in earnest. Then, as suddenly as if she had been shaken out of some deep sleep, she obtained complete control and consciousness of herself. She was not shocked because she welcomed what he had said, because she responded to it. Shame and a secret rapture overwhelmed her, and the burglar went neck and crop out of the wide-flung window of her mind. It was not till she had turned him out that any struggle in her own mind began. She knew now why she had made a habit of belittling and criticizing him to herself: she had been defending herself against him. Now she had to defend herself against herself as well. She had to inquire into the fidelity of her own garrison. And she knew that there were traitors among them. But still she was not the least shocked; certainly they must be turned out or executed or drawn and quartered, but their crime against herself did not anger her against them.

The practical aspect of the situation engaged her again, and she saw now that there was just one thing to be done, namely, to obliterate altogether what had happened—not to think of it any more at all. No doubt it was very bad that

Edith's affianced lover should have said what he had said, should have meant so much more than he said, and that she should not have been horrified at him, but only surprised, and when her surprise was passed that she should have found that there was response to him in her soul. But all this must be expunged, and if she could not forget it she must remember it only as some queer distorted dream that in reality is nonsense, though, while the dreamer still slept, it seemed so intensely real. She felt she could answer for herself in this matter, that she was quite competent to seal the affair up in her mind, as bees seal up in wax some intruder to their hive. Edward must also see that to her the whole episode was no longer existent, since non-existence was undoubtedly the best fate for it, and thus her manner to him must be exactly what it had been before he had made his unfortunate intrusion. Hardly less important was it that Edith and her aunt should remain unaware that anything had occurred between Edward and herself. This gave a reason the more for her treating him quite normally. Only . . . how did she treat him before? . . . How did she look at him? Did she usually smile when she spoke to him? She felt that to meet him again now without consciousness of what had just happened would be like meeting a perfect stranger. But it had got to be done. To admit in her bearing to him that any recollection of the scene still had a place in her mind, to indicate even by coldness of manner and an aloof demeanour that he must keep his distance was impossible, for Edith would be sure to notice it, and, above everything almost, it was essential that Edith should be utterly unaware

of any—she hardly knew what to call it—any understanding or misunderstanding between them. Over those three minutes there must be pasted a sheet of white paper. It seemed to her well within her power to do that. And she must continue to make her mind fight and belittle and criticize him. That ought to be easy now that he had done what she knew to be a despicable thing. Unfortunately she did not despise him for being despicable, or, at the most, her reason did, but not her instinct.

She heard the sound of the motor-wheels crunching the gravel, and felt perfectly prepared to resume not only her natural manner, but her normal consciousness. She swung round on her music-stool and began the intermezzo again, getting up as her aunt entered with Edith.

"Well? And I hope you've had a good practice, dear!" said Mrs. Hancock very cordially. "And we've had a pleasant drive, and not so dusty as I expected it would be. But we hurried back sooner than I intended originally, because there was a huge black cloud coming up, and Denton said he wouldn't be surprised if it came on to rain very suddenly. So I think I shall sit out in the garden to get a little more air, and you and Edith might have a game of croquet. I expect Edward will come in when the six o'clock train arrives. Dear me, it is after six. Perhaps he has been, Edith, and went back. Lind will know. Then you can all three play croquet. If you touch the bell, dear."

Elizabeth found the natural manner perfectly easy.

"He came in," she said, "and went back to his house again, I think. I was practising."

Suddenly she found herself wondering whether her manner was quite natural, and she glanced at Edith, who was "touching" the bell.

"No doubt he did not want to disturb your practice," said Mrs. Hancock, who always liked to remind herself of the comforts she showered on other people, "for I have given strict orders, dear, that you are not to be disturbed when you are practising. Perhaps he is in the garden. We will call to him over the wall. I want him to come in to dine, and you shall both play to us afterwards. I wonder if we could not get some nice duets with an easy part for you, dear, which you could play together. Look, it has begun to rain already; Denton was quite right. I am glad he advised us to turn, though it was Edith who saw the big black cloud first. There is an end to our going into the garden and to your croquet, I am afraid, but I will send a note round to Edward. I think that was a flash of lightning. Perhaps you would write the note for me, Edith, and give it to Lind. Oh yes, Lind, there will be a note. Yes, there is the thunder. Quite a loud clap. What a blessing we turned! "

Lind's wooden face looked inquiringly round when he was told that there was a note for Edward to be taken round, as if he expected to find him concealed under the piano.

"I thought Mr. Edward was here, ma'am," he said. "Perhaps he is in the garden. He said he would wait."

Elizabeth, gathering her music together, made a sudden awkward movement and spilled it.

"No, he went back home, Aunt Julia," she said. "He came in when I was practising, as I told you."

"I told him you were out, ma'am," repeated Lind, "and he said he would wait."

Elizabeth felt a wild exasperation. There was nothing to explain, and yet she had to go on explaining.

"But he went away again," she repeated.

"Yes, dear; I quite understand," said Mrs. Hancock. "He saw you were practising. Did he say he would come back? If so, I need not send this note!"

It all seemed like a plot of the Inquisition.

"No, he said nothing," remarked Elizabeth rather shortly, feeling that this perfectly straightforward visit was somehow becoming suspicious.

"Did he stop long?" asked Edith, quite casually.

"No, five minutes—ten, perhaps," said Elizabeth. "I really did not time him."

Mrs. Hancock always kept a feather in a small vase of water on her writing-table. With this she smeared the gum on the flap of envelopes in preference to the more ordinary use of the tongue on such occasions. It seemed to her slightly indelicate to put out her tongue—even the tip of it—in public; and besides, who knew what the gum was made of or who had been touching it? This genteel observance singularly annoyed Elizabeth, and it was her privilege to snatch away envelopes from her aunt and lick them herself, with, so to speak, yards of tongue protruding, rather than allow the use of the horrible feather. Here she saw her opportunity, and with a complete resumption of her natural manner, which up to that moment had not been a complete success, upset the feather's water and brought an end to the senseless catechism.

Lind was obliging enough to take the note himself, and prepared for this expedition of about forty yards by putting on a cap, a mackintosh, and goloshes, and providing himself with an umbrella. There was need only for a verbal answer, but he waited some five minutes before an acceptance came. By this time the rain had completely ceased, but Edward, from his window, saw him put up his umbrella again—no doubt to guard against drippings from the trees. He observed this with a very minute detached feeling of interest. Then he sprang up to call to Lind and substitute "regrets" for his "delight." Then that impulse died also, and he sat down to think over what had happened.

He did not fall into the mistake of considering it a little thing, though the incident in itself was nothing. It was, at the least, a feather of carded cloud high up in the heavens, that told, though so insignificant and remote a thing, of the great wind that blew there. He had not spoken idly; rather, he scarcely knew that he had spoken at all until his own words sounded in his ears. He had not addressed pretty words to a pretty girl; it seemed to him that they had been squeezed, as it were, by some force infinitely superior to his power of will out of his resisting mouth. His whole conduct, from the chance hearing of the Brahms' intermezzo in his garden, leading on to his ill-bred and silent intrusion into the room where Elizabeth played and his words, all seemed to have been dictated by an irresistible power that arose out of the sense of his incarnate dream. It had been perfectly true that for the last fortnight he had thought of nothing else but her, that the affairs of every day

had for him moved like shadows across that solid background. . . . In the meantime he had promised his substance and his life to one of the shadows, and, as far as he knew or guessed, he was nothing more than a shadow, rather a distasteful one, to the girl who for him was the only reality.

Then the practical side of the situation, the "what next" which always hastens to stir the boiling pottage of our emotions with its bony fingers, held his attention, even as it had held Elizabeth's. He came to the same conclusions, but with an important reservation. She had consigned the whole affair to complete oblivion, whether or no the consignment lay in her power; he was as glad as she to consign it also, until and unless, in legal phrase, something modified the existing conditions. He knew very well what he connoted by that modification; it meant some sign, some signal from Elizabeth that should confirm the secret welcome that her amazement had so instantly smothered. Just now he had told himself that he was but a distasteful shadow to her; now again the remembrance of her soul's leap towards him told that he was not that. Yet he had had no right to see that smothered welcome any more than he had a right to intrude himself privately into her presence. But in his heart of hearts he was ashamed of neither feat. Only his surface, his sense of breeding, his respect for things like conduct and convention rebuked him. He himself, the seer of dreams, cared not at all; rather, he hugged himself on it.

He had drifted away from practical considerations and wrenched himself back to them. On the

eighth of October next, as matters stood, he was to be married to Edith, and his conduct—again with that reservation—must be framed on the lines demanded by that condition. He felt no doubt whatever that Elizabeth would breathe no word of what had passed to her aunt or Edith, for, if she did so, it would imply wanton mischief on her part, of which he knew her to be incapable, or the determination to stop his marriage for—for other reasons. . . . She would only speak if she intended to spoil or to stop. She might, it was very likely that she would, interpose between herself and him that screen of manner, invisible as a sheet of glass, which yet cuts off all rays of heat from a fire, while it suffers to pass through it the sparkle of its brightness. She would probably appear to others to shine on him as before, but he, poor shivering wretch, would know that all warmth had been cut off from him.

For a moment his passion blazed up within him, and he felt himself barbarian and primitive man without code of morals, without regard for honour and environment. He who spent his innocuous days in an office making money, wearing a black coat, living the dull, respectable, stereotyped life, who spent his leisure in reading papers about affairs that he cared not one drop of heart's blood about, in tapping foolish croquet balls through iron hoops, in playing the piano at Heathmoor dinner-parties, in enveloping himself and his soul in the muffled cotton-wool of comfort and material ease, knew that within this swathed cocoon of himself, that lay in a decorous row of hundreds of other similar cocoons, there lurked, in spite of all contrary appearance, an individual life. He found

himself capable of love and utterly indifferent to honour or obligations, regarding them only as arbitrary rules laid down for the pursuance of the foolish game of civilized existence. In essentials he believed himself without morals, without religion, without any of the bonds that have built up corporate man and differentiate life from dreams. And this flashed discovery did not disconcert him; he felt as if he had found a jewel in the muddy flats of existence.

Then, in another flash, he was back in his cocoon again, prisoner in this decorous roomful of things which he did not want. There was a silver cigarette-box on a polished table; there was an ivory paper-knife stuck into the leaves of a book he was reading, a parquetted floor spread with Persian rugs, and all these things were symbols of slavery, chains that bound him, or, at the best, bright objects by which a baby is diverted from its crying for the moon. And the clock chiming its half-hour after seven told him he must conform to the prison rules and go to dress for dinner at Mrs. Hancock's.

He took out of his coat-pocket an envelope about which, up to this moment, he had completely forgotten. It contained the ticket for a box at the opera, which he had bought that day for a performance of "Siegfried" in a week's time. He hoped to persuade the ladies next door to be his guests, and since the pursuance of this formed part of the resumption of ordinary normal life he meant to propose his plans to them. But both when he bought the ticket and now, he saw that it might bear on the life that lay within the cocoon. More than all the material diversion or business

of the world he wanted to go with Elizabeth to "Siegfried." And, with his hat, when he started to dinner, he took the book of the music with him.

He was a little late as judged by the iron punctuality of Arundel, and he found the ladies assembled. He had one moment of intense nervousness as he entered, but it was succeeded by an eagerness not less intense when he saw Elizabeth's cordial and welcoming smile. That set the note for him; he had already determined on the same key, and he knew himself in tune with it.

As he shook hands with the girl he laughed and turned to Mrs. Hancock, involuntarily detaining Elizabeth's hand one second, not more, than was quite usual.

"I was rather nervous," he said. "I intruded on Elizabeth's practice this afternoon. Perhaps she has told you. In fact, I meant to stay to wait for your return and Edith's, but I found it quite impossible."

"Dear!" said Mrs. Hancock. "Yes, Lind has told us dinner is ready. Did Elizabeth scold you?"

Elizabeth, equally relieved, laughed.

"You behaved very rudely, Edward," she said; "and, as a matter of fact, I didn't tell them. I wanted to screen you. But as you don't seem in the least ashamed of yourself I shall give you up."

"What revelations we are going to have!" said Mrs. Hancock. "Yes, your favourite soup, Edward. Mrs. Williams thought of it when she heard you were coming. She sent out for the

cream. Now let us hear all about it. I thought there was some mystery."

This was not quite true. Mrs. Hancock had not thought anything whatever about it. But this phrase of purely dinner conversation disconcerted Elizabeth for a moment. Edith, suddenly looking up, perceived this obscure embarrassment.

"No, Aunt Julia, there was no mystery," said Elizabeth. "There was merely my mistaken kindness in sparing Edward. Now I shall sacrifice and expose him. He came in when I was practising quietly, so that I didn't hear him, and sat down to listen. And when I had finished my piece I turned round and saw him, and, of course, I was startled and annoyed. Wasn't it caddish of him! Do say it was caddish!"

That should have been sufficiently robust to have carried off and finished with the subject. But it so happened that Mrs. Hancock went on.

"My dear, what words to use!" she said. "Edith will be up in arms. Look, there is another flash of lightning! We shall have a regular storm, I am afraid. And what did you say to him?"

"She told me to go away," said Edward, "which I did. And I asked her to forgive me. I don't know if she's done that yet."

The desire for secret communication with her prompted and impelled him.

"I shall ask her later if she has," he said, raising his eyes to her face. "Her screening me was a sign of her softening."

"But her giving you away now shows signs of hardening again," said Edith.

"Perhaps she doesn't know her own mind," said Edward, still looking at her, and knowing but

not caring that he had no business to force replies on her, so long as he could talk with a meaning that was clear to her alone.

This time the secret look that leaped out to him below her amazement showed again through the trouble and brightness of her face.

"I know my mind perfectly," she said. "I will forgive you if you are sorry."

"I am. But I liked hearing you play when you didn't know any one was there."

Mrs. Hancock looked vaguely and beamingly round.

"But I always thought that people played best when there was an audience to listen to them," she said.

"There was an audience," remarked Edward.

Mrs. Hancock saw the fallacy without a moment's hesitation, and enlarged on it till it became more clear than the sun at noonday.

"But she didn't know there was," she said lucidly, "and so it would count as if there wasn't. Listen, there is the rain beginning again, like that beautiful piece of Edward's which always makes me feel sad. He shall play it to us after dinner. Was it one of your pieces that Elizabeth was playing before, Edward?"

Mrs. Hancock always spoke of immortal works by classical masters as if Edward's atrocious renderings of them gave him the entire right and possession of them.

"No," said he, "it was her own. I shall always think of it as the Elizabintermezzo."

Mrs. Hancock turned an attentive eye on the asparagus dish.

"Finish it, Edward," she said; "it is the last

you will get from my garden this year, and what an amusing conversation we are having about Elizabeth and you ! Elizabintermezzo—the intermezzo which Elizabeth plays ! What a good word ! Quite a portmanteau ! "

All this private signalling of Edward to her, all his double-edged questions as to whether she had forgiven him, seemed to Elizabeth in the worst possible taste. She had just now announced, so frankly that she could not be imagined to be serious, that he had behaved caddishly that afternoon, and his behaviour now seemed to endorse her judgment. And yet she, by her outspokenness perhaps, had set the fashion of double-edged speech ; it was justifiable in him to think that she meant to allude to what neither of them openly alluded to. But he was caddish ; she felt irritated and disgusted with him. She looked at him with eyebrows that first frowned and then were raised in expostulation.

" Haven't we all had enough of my practice this afternoon? " she said.

As she looked at him she noticed what she had noticed a hundred times before, how his hair above his forehead grew straight and then fell over in a plume. And while her mind was ruffled with his behaviour, she suddenly liked that enormously. She wondered if it was elastic, that thickness of erect hair, like a spring-mattress ; she wanted to put her hand on it. And that radical and superficial emotion called physical attraction had begun —superficial because it concerns merely the outward form and colour of face and limbs, radical because all the sex-love in the world springs from its root which is buried in the beating heart of

humanity. Afterwards, no doubt, those roots may dissolve and become part of the life-blood, red corpuscles of love, but without them there has never yet opened the glorious scarlet of the flowers of passion, nor the shining foliage that keeps the world green.

Thus, at the very moment when he was indifferent to her except that she was a little nauseated by his behaviour, he began to become different to all others, and very faintly but authentically it was whispered to her that he and she "belonged," that they fitted, entwined and interlacing, into this great Chinese puzzle of a world. Instantly she shut her ears to the whisper. But she had heard it.

He had the decency, she allowed, to change the subject.

"No encore for the intermezzo," he said; "but 'Siegfried' is being given this day week, and I have got a box for it. I want you all to come."

"Well, that would be a treat," said Mrs. Hancock. "These are the first white-heart cherries we've had from the garden, Edward. You must take some! 'Siegfried!' That is by Wagner."

Elizabeth banished from her mind caddishness and springy hair alike.

"Oh, Aunt Julia!" she exclaimed.

"That is capital, then!" said Edward, knowing the value of an atmosphere of certainty. "We had better all sleep in town so that we can stop to the end without any sense of being hurried, which would spoil it all. I'll see to all that, and, of course, it's my treat."

Mrs. Hancock's face changed, but brightened

again as she caught the full flavour of the first white-heart.

"Sleep in town!" she said. "I never—— Aren't the cherries good? I shall tell Ellis he was quite right when he wanted extra manure. Delicious! But sleep in town, Edward! Is that necessary? Can't we come away before the end, for I quite agree with you that it is no use stopping in your seat grasping a fan in one hand and your dress in the other, waiting for the curtain to go down. And even then, they all come on and bow. Wouldn't it be better if we all slipped out in plenty of time to catch the theatre-train, as we always do?"

Elizabeth sighed.

"Aunt Julia, I would sooner not go at all than come away before the end," she said. "It's the love duet, you know, and oh! I've never seen it!"

Aunt Julia looked mild reproof.

"My dear, we mustn't be in a hurry. We must think it over and see how we can contrive."

"We can contrive by stopping in town," said Elizabeth. "Or couldn't you drive down in your car afterwards?"

"But, my dear, it might be a wet night, and if we drove back it would only be reasonable to drive up. Shall we have coffee in here now for an exception, and then we need not interrupt ourselves? Yes, Lind, coffee in here, not in the drawing-room, but here. It would only be reasonable, as I said, to drive up, for it would be no use going by train, while Denton took up the car empty, and if it was a wet night I should not like him hanging about all afternoon and evening, for his wife expects a baby." This was aside to Edward.

though since Edith was soon to be married she did not so much mind her hearing.

"But his wife isn't going to hang about all afternoon and evening," said Elizabeth swiftly.

"My dear, let me talk it over with Edward! And Denton would not know how to meet us at the opera—we might miss him, and then what would happen?"

Edward laughed.

"Then, Mrs. Hancock, you would have to sleep in town uncomfortably, without night things, instead of sleeping comfortably according to my plans."

"But I should have to take Filson," said Mrs. Hancock, rather unwisely, since if you mean not to do a thing—and she had not the smallest wish to see "Siegfried"—it weakens the position to argue, however sensibly, about it.

"Of course you would take Filson!" said Edward. "Take Lind as well, if you like! I will arrange it all."

"Well, it would be an event, wouldn't it, to see the opera and sleep up in town," said Mrs. Hancock, who, though she did not mean to go, a little hankered after anything of this sort, if it was to be had without any expense. "But there would be a great deal to think of and to plan. I always forget if you take cream, Edward. Yes? A great deal to plan, for if one is to go one must look tidy, and have a few jewels."

She formed a rapid mental picture of herself in the front of a box with the pearls, and perhaps the tiara. It rather attracted her, but she felt that if she stayed in a hotel she would not get a wink of sleep all night with thinking of those treasures.

She rejected the picture, but simultaneously a bright idea struck her.

"Wednesday next, did you say?" she asked guilefully.

"No, Thursday."

Mrs. Hancock made a gesture of impatience.

"Well, if that isn't annoying," she said, "when we were arranging it so nicely and getting over every difficulty. Because Thursday is Mrs. Martin's garden-party, which I haven't missed in all the years I have been at Heathmoor, and I mustn't miss it! She would think it so unkind, for she always says she depends on me. I wonder if she could possibly change her day. Listen to the rain. I hope you have brought your mackintosh, Edward. No, I'm afraid it's too late to ask her, for the invitations are already sent out. Well, that does knock our delightful plan on the head. How battered the garden will be, though we want rain. And 'Siegfried,' too; of all operas that is the one I should so like to see again. But I have an idea. Yes, pray light your cigarette, Edward! What if you took these two girls up to see it? Couldn't they be supposed to chaperone each other, and Edith so nearly married, too? I don't know what people would think, though!"

Mrs. Hancock was the soul of good nature, and having so adroitly shown the impossibility of herself partaking in this plan, thought nothing of the disagreeableness of spending an evening alone.

"But couldn't you came after the garden-party, mother?" asked Edith.

"My dear, I should be a rag! Mrs. Martin says that she feels no responsibility if I am there

at her party, but I assure you I do. I have always said it is no use trying to listen to music unless you are fresh. It is an insult to the music. But I wonder if it is very wrong of me to suggest such a thing. Edith, darling, the candle-shade. Well done! You have saved it. But if you girls go up together and join Edward in town I don't see who will know. Well, that will be a secret for us all to keep! Shall we all go into the drawing-room? Hark how the rain is falling! We must have some music."

"Then that's settled?" asked Edward.

"If these young ladies approve. But what a lot we have to arrange—where you are to go, and where they are to meet you, and the train they are to come back by in the morning." She paused a moment as she took up her patience pack.

"And Filson shall go up with them!" she proclaimed. "It will make me feel more comfortable if I know Filson is there. What a talk we have had! I declare it is half-past nine already! Do let us have some music! Edith, dear, I think you might open the window into the garden a little bit. If any of us feel it damp, we can close it again. Look, there are two aces out already. What a good beginning!"

Edward turned to Elizabeth.

"And you like the 'Siegfried' plan?" he asked.

"But it's too nice of you! I——"

She stopped.

"Do go on," he said, speaking low.

Suddenly Elizabeth saw that Edith was observing them.

"I suppose I shall have to forgive you," she

said, in a voice clearly audible, "now that you are taking me to 'Siegfried.'"

And the very fact that she spoke aloud, so that Edith could hear, falsified, so she felt, the truth of her light speech. She knew he would not take it quite lightly, and she allowed him to put one construction on it, so that Edith might put another.

His eye quickened with the secret message he sent to her, and she did not refuse it.

"But it wasn't a bribe," said he with his lips. "I made the plan before I sinned. So play your intermezzo."

A week afterwards Elizabeth was walking up and down the long garden-path while the morning was yet dewy. She had awoke early on this day that she and Edith were going up to town to see the opera, woke with a sense of ecstatic joy in life, of intense and rapturous happiness. For the last week she had been living in a storm of emotion, that seemed not to come from within her, but from without, beating and buffeting her, but giving her, from time to time, serene and wonderful hours. She had wrestled with and worked over the transcript of "Siegfried" until she had made the music her own, and she seemed to have come into a heritage that was waiting ready for her to claim it. The passionate excitement of the true musician, with all its flow of flooding revelations, its stream of infinite rewards was hers; she had entered that kingdom which, to all except those few who can say "we musicians know," is but a beautiful cloudland and a place of bewildering mists. But now for her it had cleared;

she had come into her own, and saw steadfastly what she had before but guessed at, of what she had heard but hints and seen images. Till now, with all her love of music, she had been but a speller of the mere words that made its language, knowing the words to be beautiful and feeling their nameless charm. But now it was as if the printed page of their poetry was open to her. There was meaning as well as beauty, coherence and romance in the sounds which had hitherto but suggested images to her.

The revelation had not come singly ; the golden gates had not swung open of their own accord. Well, she knew the hand which for her had thrown them open, the wind that had dispersed the mists. She was in love, in love, as she had once said indifferently and disappointedly, with " a common man." Beyond any shadow of doubt it was that which had opened out the kingdom of music for her ; thus quickened, her receptive nature had been enabled to receive. Hitherto she had been like a deaf man, vivid in imagination, to whom the magic of sound had been described. Her perceptions had been dormant ; she had but felt the light as the bud of a folded flower may be imagined to feel it. Now she received it on expanded petals.

About that love itself she had at present no qualms, she admitted no recognition of its hopelessness, she had no perception of its dangers. She was too full of the first wonder of its dawning to guess or to care what the risen day might bring forth. The fact that Edward was engaged to be married to her cousin was a complete safeguard against dangers which she barely con-

jectured, and the very thought of hope or hopelessness made no imprint on her mind, for in the presence of the thing herself she could not bring herself to consider the possible issues of it. It exalted and possessed her ; the fact that she loved filled her entire being, which already brimmed with her new perceptions of music. Each heightened the other, each was infinite, possessing the whole of her. She had no thought for the morrow, or for the day, or for herself. The whole of the eagerness of her youth was enslaved in a perfect freedom. She was blind and ecstatic, and in truth was running heedlessly, sightlessly between quicksands and deep seas and precipices, unconscious of them all, and above all, unconscious of herself, absorbed by love and melody, even as the dew on the lawn was being absorbed by the sun.

Above, the sky was unflecked by cloud and as yet of pale and liquid blue ; the warm air had still a touch of night's coolness in it, and the young day seemed like a rosy child awakening from sleep. At the end of the garden the tall elms stood motionless, towers of midsummer leaf, and the smell of the evaporating dew that had lain all night in the bosom of red roses and among the thick-bladed grass of the lawn, told her where it had slept. It hung thick on the threads of the netted fruit-trees, and glimmered on the red-brick wall that ran alongside the shining gravel walk. Already the bees had begun their garnerings, the birds were a-chuckle in the bushes, and suddenly the whole pervading sweetness and song of the morning smote on Elizabeth's heart, already full to overflowing, and demanded the expression of

her gratitude. She was compelled to thank somebody for it—not Ellis, not Aunt Julia, not Edward even.

"Somebody, anyhow!" she said aloud.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MOUNTAIN-TOP

EDWARD, from long living at Heathmoor, had little to learn about comfort, and the arrangements he had made for the two girls were of a completeness that Mrs. Hancock could hardly have rivalled, even if she had been concerned with plans for herself. He had gone up to town by the 9.6 a.m. that morning, and had shown himself but briefly at his office, devoting the rest of his time to orders and inspection. He had been to see the rooms prepared for their reception at the Savoy, bedrooms for the two girls, with a sitting-room between, had shown in a practical way that he recollected Elizabeth's ardour for sweet peas and Edith's respect for roses, had ordered tea to be ready for their arrival, a table to be reserved in the restaurant for their dinner between the acts, and an entrancing little supper to be served in the sitting-room when the opera was over. Finally, he was waiting at the station with his motor for their arrival.

It was not only the desire for their comfort that prompted this meticulous supervision, for the evening in prospect was symbolical to him of a parting, a farewell, and, with the spirit in which all farewells should be said, he wished to join hands with Elizabeth once more festally and

superbly, not with lingering glances and secret signs, but to the sound of music and to the sight of a glorious drama. He had spent this last week among waves and billows of emotions, and, though his ship had not foundered, his lack of experience as a sailor in such seas had completely upset him in every other sense. But to-night, he had told himself, he would reach port ; already he had rounded the pier-head, and within a few hours now he would put Elizabeth ashore. The pier was decorated for her reception, flags waved and bands played. He would part with her splendidly, and go back to his boat, where Edith would await him for their lifelong cruise in calm and pleasant waters.

He had made, so he honestly believed, the honest decision, and though honesty is a virtue which is so much taken for granted that it is ranked rather among the postulates of life than among its acquirements, honest decisions are not always made without struggle and difficulty. He felt for Elizabeth, the actual flesh and blood and spirit of her, what he had only hitherto imagined in the dreams which, a few months before, he had settled to have done with. Bitterly, and with more poignancy of feeling than he had thought himself capable of, he regretted his precipitancy in their abandonment ; in a few months more he would have seen them realized, he would have had his human chance, of an attractive boy with a girl, to have made them true. But he had not waited ; he had shaken himself awake, and, with full sense of what he was doing, had made love to and been accepted by the girl he knew and liked and admired. To-day he acknowledged his responsi-

bility and had no intention of shirking it. A week of what was not less than spiritual anguish had resulted in this decision. In one direction he was pulled by honour, in the other by love. He had a "previous engagement," which, he had settled, took rank before anything else whatever. He believed, without the smallest touch of complacency, that Edith loved him, but he believed also (and again not a grain of that odious emotion entered into his belief) that had he been free Elizabeth would have accepted him. Since his deplorable lapse a week ago, she had treated him with a friendlier intimacy than ever ; this, for they had had no further word on the subject, he interpreted to mean that out of the generosity of her nature she had completely forgiven him and obliterated the occurrence, and that her friendliness was meant to show how entirely she trusted him for the future. In this he was absolutely right ; he was right also in the corollary he instinctively added, that she would not have adopted this attitude unless she was fond of him. She could quite correctly have kept him at arm's length, she could have continued to manifest that slight hostility to him which had previously characterized her behaviour. But she had not ; she had given him a greater warmth and friendliness than ever before.

So far he could let his thoughts bear him without shame or secrecy. But there went on beneath them a tow, an undercurrent, which, though he suppressed and refused to regard it, was what had caused, in the main, the soul-storm in which he had been buffeted all this week. He believed there was more than friendliness in her regard

for him, and with the terrible sharpsightedness of blind love (as if one of his eyes saw nothing, while the other was gifted with portentous vision) he had not missed the signs, little signs, a look, a word, a movement, which are the feelers of love, waving tentacles of infinite sensitiveness, that threadlike and invisible to the ordinary beholder, shrivel and spring and touch instinctively without volition on their owner's part. No one, fairly and impartially judging, could say that Elizabeth had behaved to him except with friendly unreserve. But to him she seemed to reserve much, to reserve all.

In spite of all this, Edward, as he waited on the platform for the arrival of their train, had no doubt that he was doing right in following the demands of honour. He had killed his dreams, so to speak, when he engaged himself to Edith ; to-night, to the sound of flutes and violins, he was going to conduct their funeral, and did not see that in reality he was intending to bury them alive, and that dreams are not smothered by burial ; rather, like the roots of plants, they grow and flourish beneath the earth, sending up the sap that feeds their blossoms. He did not contemplate the future with dismay ; he believed that both he and Edith would have a very pleasant, comfortable life together, according to the Heathmoor pattern. And with a touch of cynicism, which was unusual with him, he added, as the train steamed in, that this was more than could be said for many marriages. Then, before the train stopped, he saw Elizabeth get out and look round for him with shining, excited eyes, and his heart beat quick at her recognition of him.

The three met with jubilance, and drove straight to the Savoy, for there was not more than time to have tea and dress. The day, like the last dozen of its predecessors, had been dry and dusty, and the roadway in front of the hotel had been liberally watered. Stepping out of the motor, Edith slipped and fell heavily, her foot doubled under her. Bravely she tried to smile, bravely also she tried to get up. But the smile faded in the agony of her twisted ankle, and she was helped into the hotel.

It seemed at first that it might be a wrench of little consequence, the pain of which would be assuaged by ten minutes' rest. But all that ten minutes did for her was to give her a badly swollen ankle, and show the utter impossibility of her setting foot to the ground. Then, swathed in wet bandages, and lying on the sofa in the sitting-room, she took a peremptory line with the others.

"You two must go," she said; "and if you wait here any longer you will be late. If you aren't both of you ready to start in a quarter of an hour, I shall go myself, bandage and all, if I have to hop there."

"But you can't spend the evening alone," said Elizabeth. "And we——"

"I shan't spend the evening alone, because we shall all have supper together. Dinner, too, if you will be awfully kind, Edward, and have it up here with me instead of in the restaurant."

Edward had already yielded in his heart—yielded with a secret exulting rapture. The Fates, though at Edith's expense, were giving him a splendid farewell to Elizabeth. They would be alone together for it; he did not let his thoughts progress further than that.

"If you insist——" he began.

"Am I not insisting? My dear, it is a dreadful bore, but we must make the best of it. Be kind, and order dinner here instead, and go to dress."

Elizabeth was left alone with her cousin.

"But Aunt Julia!" she said. "What will she say?"

"I have thought of that. Mother mustn't know. You must coach me up when you come back, and —and I shall have sprained my ankle when we came back to the hotel at the end. Don't forget! Oh, do go and get ready, Elizabeth; it's all settled! I can't bear that Edward should be disappointed in not seeing 'Siegfried,' nor, indeed, that you should. It would be perfectly senseless that you should stop at home because I can't go!"

It cost Elizabeth something to argue against this. She wanted passionately to see the opera, and if a dream-wish, a fairy-wish, for a thing that was impossible could have been presented to her that morning, she would have chosen to see the awakening of Brunnhilde alone with Edward. His wild-blurted speech when he intruded upon her practising a week ago she had buried, so complete since then had been his discretion, and if she thought of it at all, she thought of it only as a momentary lapse, an unguarded exaggeration. Since then she had not defended herself against him by any coldness of manner, any unspoken belittlement of him, and they had arrived at a franker and more affectionate intimacy than ever before. She did not inquire or conjecture what his secret emotional history was. She was safeguarded enough from him by his

engagement to Edith ; while from herself her own integrity of purpose seemed a sufficient shield. Yet she argued against Edith's insistence on the fulfilment of the fairy-wish.

"But Aunt Julia wouldn't like it," she said.

"I can't help that!" said Edith. "I want it so much that I don't care what mother would think. Besides, she won't think anything. She will never know." Edith paused a moment and flushed.

"Besides, dear," she said, "if I asked you and Edward, or even wanted you not to go, what reason could there be for it? It would appear so—so odious—as if—— I can't say it! Oh, go and dress!"

The unspoken word was clear enough, and it contained all that Elizabeth was conscious of. It would have been odious that either of them should harbour the thought that Edith could not put into words. It was sufficient.

The two came back to dine at the end of the first act, full to the brim of music, intoxicated with the beady ferment of sound and drama, and both a little beside themselves with excitement. At present the music, and that alone, held them ; in the flame of their common passion each as yet paid little heed to the other, except as a sharer in it. Elizabeth hardly touched any food ; she was silent and bright-eyed, exploring her new kingdom. But with Edward, the return to the hotel, to the common needs of food and drink, above all, to Edith, took him poignantly back into the actual world again. Once again, more vividly than ever before, his choice which he told him-

self was already decided, was set before him as he sat with Elizabeth silent and strung-up on the one side, with Edith intelligently questioning him, with a view to subsequent catechism of herself on the other. Her questions seemed idiotic interruptions ; he could barely make courteous narrative—"And then Mime told him about his youth. And then he began to forge the sword. Yes, it was Palstecher who played Siegfried—he was in excellent voice. . . ."

He did not revoke his choice, but he ceased to think of it. He wanted only, for the present, to hasten the tardy progress of the hands of the clock to the moment when it would be time for him to go away again alone with Elizabeth. But the aspect of this evening, as his farewell to her, was ousted in his mind by the prospect of the next hour or two. He thought less of what it symbolized ; more and growingly more of what it was. But even as no thunderstorm bursts without the menace of gathering clouds, so the thickening intensity of his emotions warned him with utterly disregarded caution, that forces of savage import were collecting. Had a friend laid the facts, the possibilities, the danger before him, and asked his opinion as to what a man should do under such circumstances, unhesitatingly would he have advised, without regard to any other issue, that he should not go back alone with Elizabeth. Let him take a waiter from the hotel, a stranger out of the street, rather than trust himself alone to keep a steady head and a firm foot in those precipiced and slippery places. Had he believed that Elizabeth had no touch of more than pleasant friendly feelings towards him, he might have been

justified in believing in himself. But—and this was the very spring and foundation of his excitement, his expectancy—he did not so believe. He fancied, rightly or wrongly, that she had shown signs of a warmer regard for him than that. But still, as unconvincingly as a parrot-cry, he kept saying to himself, "Edith trusts me, and therefore I trust myself." He did not even feel he was doing a dangerous thing; he felt only that he had an irresistible need to be with Elizabeth in the isolation of the darkened house when Brunnhilde awoke.

The performance, viewed artistically, was magnificent. From height to height mounted the second act, till the sounds of the noonday, the murmurs of the forest, grew from the scarcely audible notes to the full triumphant symphony of sunlight and living things, pervading, all-embracing, bringing the voice of all nature to endorse heroic deeds, and at the same time to bring to the hero the knowledge of his human needs. To him, even as to Siegfried, it woke in his heart the irresistible need of love, of the ideal mate, of the woman of his dreams, who sat beside him. Once only, as the clear call of the bird rang through the hushed house, did Elizabeth take her eyes off the stage, and turned them, dewy with tears and bright with wonder, on him. She said no word, but unconsciously moved her chair a little nearer his and laid her ungloved hand on his knee.

He had one moment's hesitation—one moment in which it was in his power to check himself. There was just one branch of a tree, so to speak, hanging above the rapids down which he was

hurrying, and it was just possible, with an effort, to grasp it. He made no such effort. Deliberately, if anything in this fervour of growing madness could be called deliberate, he let that moment go by; deliberately he rejected the image of Edith awaiting their return, and, all aflame, acquiesced with his will in anything that should happen. Deliberately he cast the reins on the backs of his flying steeds, and not again did the sense that he had any choice in the matter come to him. The last atom of his manliness was absorbed in his manhood. Elizabeth's hand lay on his knee, the fingers bending over it inwards. Gently he pressed them with his other knee, and he felt her response. She had but sought that touch to assure herself she was in tune with him, one with him over this miracle that she was looking at; but on the moment she felt there was more than that both in that pressure of her hand and her own response to it. But she was too absorbed, too rapt to care; nothing mattered except Siegfried, and the fact that she and Edward were together and beating with one heart's-blood about it.

And presently afterwards Brunnhilde lay beneath the pines in her shining armour, and through the flames, the vain obstacle that barred his approach to her, came Siegfried. Of no avail to her was the armour of her maidenhood, for while she slept he loosened it, and of no avail to stay his approach was the fierceness of the flames that girt her resting-place. At his kiss—the kiss that sealed her his—the strong throb of her blood beat again in her body; the eyes that had so long been shut in her unmolested sleep were unclosed, and she sat up and saluted the sun, and she saluted

the day and the earth and all the myriad sounds and sights and odours that told her she was born into life again. Siegfried had stood back in awe at the wonder and holiness of her awakening, and she turned and saw him. And once more Elizabeth turned to Edward, and their eyes met in a long glance.

To each, at that moment, to her no less than to him, it was the drama of their own souls that was unfolding in melody and love-song before them. She needed to look at him but for that one glance of recognition, for there on the stage she learned, as she saw the immortal lovers together, the immortality of love. The whole air rang with this supreme expression of it, the violins and the flutes and that glorious voice of Brunnhilde spoke for her, and it was her companion, here in the box with her, who bore the rapture higher, who completed it, made it perfect. Indeed, there was greeting in the farewell; if he said "vale" to her he sang "ave" also. But his "vale" was less now than a mutter below his breath.

She sat with her arms resting on the front of the box till the last triumphant notes rang out, and through the applause that followed she still sat there, unmoving. There was no before or after for her then; her consciousness moved upon a limitless, an infinite plane. He had left his place, and when she turned he was standing close behind her. Again their eyes met in that long look, and the question that was in his saw itself answered by the smile, shy and solemn, that shone in hers. Then, still in silence, they went out into the crowd that filled the passages.

The entrance porch was crowded with the efflux

of the house, waiting for their carriages to arrive, and Elizabeth saw the surging, glittering scene with a strange, hard distinctness; but it all seemed remote from her, as if it was enclosed in walls of crystal. The crowd was no more to her than a beehive of busy, moving little lives, altogether sundered in intelligence and interests from herself and Edward. The whole world had receded on to the insect-plane; it crawled and skipped and jostled about her, but he and she were infinitely removed from it, and it aroused in her just the vague wonder of a man idly gazing at a disturbed ant-hill, hardly wondering what all the bustle was about. Here and there stood members of this throng, waiting quietly in corners, taking no part in the movement, and it just occurred to her that in a room in the Savoy Hotel there was another such member of this queer, busy little race waiting their return. But even the thought of Edith barely found footing in her mind; she was but another specimen under glass.

The night was quite fine, and in a moment or two they had made their way out of the doors and were walking down the queue of carriages to find their motor. He had suggested that she should wait while he hunted it and brought it up, but she preferred to go out of this crowded insect-house to look for it with him. The street was full also of the vague throng, that also seemed utterly unreal, utterly without significance; she would scarcely have been surprised if the lights and the people and the houses and the high-swung moon had all collapsed and melted away, leaving only a mountain-top girt with flames that rose and fell with gusts of sparkling melody. She would not be

alone there; her whole self, her completed self, at least would be there—the self which she had seen so often, had criticized and belittled, which, till this evening, she had never known to be herself. Now she knew nothing else. All the rest was a mimic world, full of busy little insects.

The motor was soon found, and she stepped in, followed by Edward. She had heard him give some directions to the chauffeur about driving down to the Embankment, and going to that entrance of the hotel, and they slid out of the queue and turned. So intensely did she feel his presence that it seemed to bring him no nearer to her when he took her hand in his, when she heard him whisper—

"Brunnhilde—you awoke!"

"Yes, Siegfried," she answered.

And his arms were round her, and for one second she clung close to him as he kissed her.

Then, even while his fire burned close to her, so that it mingled with her own blaze, and while the ringing of the music that was mystically one with it drowned all other sound, the real world, the actual world, which had quite vanished from her consciousness, stood round her again, menacing, reminding, appalling. Her real self, her integrity, her honour pointed at her in amazement, in horror, so that through their eyes, and not through the eyes of her passion, she saw herself and what she was doing, and what she was permitting, and what she was rapturously welcoming. Memory, loyalty, honesty cried aloud at her, and though it seemed that she was tearing part of herself away she wrenched herself free.

"Oh, what are we doing?" she cried. "We

are both mad! And you—— Oh, why did you let me? Why did you make it possible for me? Let me go, Edward!"

He had seized her again.

"I can't!" he said. "You are mine, and you know it! It's you that I have dreamed of all my life! We both dreamed, and we have awoke to-night to find it is true!"

Again, and this time easily, she shook herself free of him, for that in him which had struggled before, which had planned this evening as a farewell to her, came to her aid. For the moment, Elizabeth, far stronger than he in will, was wholly against him, and against him he had honourable traitors in his own house.

"We dreamed to-night of impossible things," she said; "and I have awoke again."

She began to tremble violently as the struggle to maintain that first flush of true vision seized her. It had come to her with the flashing stroke of impulse; now—and here was the difficulty—she had to keep hold of it.

"Edward, you see it as I do really!" she said. "You know we've been mad, mad! Ah, thank God, here we are!"

The motor had stopped by the hotel door, and already a porter was coming across the pavement to it.

"No, we can't leave it like this," he said. "Let's drive on for a little. Just for ten minutes, Elizabeth." He was on the near side of the carriage and tried to prevent her getting up.

"Come to your senses!" she said.

"But it is impossible to meet Edith like this!" he said. "She will see——"

He considered that for a moment. What if she did see? Was not that exactly what he desired? But Elizabeth interrupted him.

"She won't, because she mustn't," she said. "I can do my share, you must do yours. Get out, please!"

Next moment he followed her into the hotel. At the door of the sitting-room she paused a moment, feeling suddenly tired and incapable, and she looked appealingly at him as he joined her.

"Edward, do help me!" she said. "I rely on you!"

The tremendous pressure at which she had been living all day helped Elizabeth now, for reaction had not come yet, and whatever at that moment she had been set to do she would have done it with ten thousand horse-power. She made a rush of it across the room to where Edith lay, dropping fan, gloves, handkerchief on her way, and it seemed that Edward's help would chiefly consist in listening.

"Oh, my dear," she cried, "we've gone quite mad, both Edward and I! There is nothing in the world but Brunnhilde and Siegfried!"

She kissed Edith, and went on breathlessly, turning the deep tumult of her soul into the merest froth.

"Siegfried and Brunnhilde, Brunnhilde and Siegfried! I felt I was Brunnhilde, darling, and I was rather surprised that Edward did not kiss me!"

"I will now, if you like!" remarked Edward, taking his cue unerringly.

"Yes, do; you're such a dear for having taken me! Perhaps you had better not, though. It's

a little late : you should have done it earlier, and besides, Edith might not like it. We must consider Edith now, after thinking about our own enjoyment all the evening. How is the ankle? I ask out of politeness, dear ; I don't really care in the least how your ankle is ! I only care for Siegfried ! Oh, do let's have supper at once. I had no dinner to mention, and I am brutally hungry. That is the effect of emotion. After daddy was charged out pig-sticking, and was nearly killed, I ate the largest lunch I ever remember. Ah, they are bringing it ! I shall never go on hunger-strike whatever happens to me ! Siegfried ! That wasn't quite in tune. Oh, Edith ! Now help me to pull her sofa up to the table, Edward. Then she needn't move at all. And how is your ankle? I do care, really ! "

This remarkable series of statements and questions could hardly be called conversation, but it served its purpose in starting social intercourse again.

Edith turned to Edward.

" Is she mad? " she asked. " And are you mad, too? "

" Yes, he has got dumb madness," said Elizabeth. " He hasn't said a word all the evening. Occasional sighs. Oh, I wish you had been there, Edith ! Yes, certainly soup ! For the third time I inquire about your ankle ! "

Looking up, she caught Edward's eye for a moment. He was eagerly gazing at her, as Siegfried gazed at Brunnhilde—that was in some opera she had once seen in remote ages ago, in some dim land of dreams, in—— And as she looked at him the stream of her babbling talk froze on her

lips and her heart beat quick, and she was back again in the darkness of the motor, and she was saying to him, "Yes, Siegfried!" without thought of anything but the present moment, and of her love. Then, with a sense of coming from some infinite distance, she was back in this sitting-room again, conscious that Edith had said something, and that she had not the remotest notion what it was.

But Edward answered.

"That is capital!" he said. "I am glad it is better. Of course, you and Elizabeth will drive down in the motor to-morrow morning, so that you needn't walk at all. When will you go? I must tell Joynes at what time he is to come round."

So he, Edward, also belonged to his world, not to the world of the mountain-top and the ring of flame. Of course he did; he was going to marry Edith on October 8th, and it was not yet certain if she herself would be there or not. She would be leaving about then for India—it depended on whether she could get a passage by the boat that left Marseilles on the 15th. She felt like a child saying over to itself some absurd nonsense rhyme. July, August, September, then October—"Thirty days hath October." It did not sound right. Quail—yes, why not quail? So little while ago she lay on her mountain-top, and Siegfried loosed her armour and kissed her.

Supper was over, and Edith was saying something to her about her looking very tired. She was suggesting that she should go to bed. For herself, she was going to sit up a little longer and have a chat with Edward, for he had to coach her thoroughly in the opera, since Mrs. Hancock was

never to know—at least, not at present—the true history of the evening.

Elizabeth found herself laughing at that; it seemed so unnecessary to say that Mrs. Hancock must never know the true history of the evening. Nor must Edith herself ever know the true history of the evening—never, never. There was no question of "not for the present" about that. But that Mrs. Hancock should not know the mere fact that she and Edward went to the opera alone seemed a ludicrous stratagem, laughable.

"What a tangled web we are going to weave all about nothing," she said. "I warn you, Edith, I shall be sure to forget, and let it out!"

"Oh, mother would be horrified!" said Edith. "You must take care!"

Elizabeth sat down and took one of Edward's cigarettes. Somehow, her revulsion of feeling against him had altogether vanished, and her yearning for him was stealing back again like pain that has been temporarily numbed and begins to reassert itself. The dream, the impossibility was that on October 8th he was going to marry Edith. It was quite incredible, a mere piece of nonsense that she had heard down at some dream-place called Heathmoor, where everybody was fast asleep. It was just part of the dreams of one of them, of Aunt Julia, perhaps, who certainly had no pains or joys, only comforts. She herself had to humour the dream-people, saying things to those drowsy people (of whom Edith was one) which really had a meaning, but not for them.

"But have we really done anything so awful?" she asked. "Is it highly improper that Edward and I should go to the opera together? There

were about two thousand people there to chaperone us, and a lot of them were so respectable—bald men and stringy women ! " She laughed again. " Did you see the one just behind us, Edward? " she said. " I'm sure you did ! She had been out and got caught in a sudden shower of diamonds. She was peppered with them. There were several on her forehead, and I think one on her nose. Oh, dear ! "

" And why that? " asked Edith.

" Because I feel quite mad, and because I am afraid I shall recover. I suppose I shall go to Heathmoor again to-morrow. There will be Lind there, and Mr. Martin, and, and—— Any other place would be as bad. It isn't that Heathmoor is more impossible than London or India, or any other place would be. Yes, I'll remember that you sprained your ankle after the opera—about now, in fact ; and then I helped you to bed, and then I went to bed myself, exactly as I'm going to do ! Oh, I'm so tired ! Good-night, Siegfried and Brunnhilde ! Edward, you are a darling for taking me ! "

Next minute she was alone in her bedroom, and there shot through her like fire a pain, agonizing and contemptible, which she had never known before ; the intolerable torture of jealousy seized her, and she writhed in its grip. As clearly as if the scene was before her eyes, she knew what was happening next door. She could almost hear Edith saying in that quiet, sincere voice of hers, " Now we shall have a little time alone, Edward. I thought dear Elizabeth was never going. Is she not queer and excited to-night? " And she would hold out her hand to him, and he would sit on the

edge of her sofa holding it in his, and he would bend to kiss her, not once, not once only. They would whisper together the words that were natural and proper between pledged lovers, the words that but an hour ago he was burning to say to her. Now, she made no doubt, he was glib with them to Edith. And yet an hour ago she had wrenched herself away from his arm and his kiss with horror and upheaval of her nature. Of that horror there was nothing left now in the hour of the first onslaught of jealousy. Now it was inconceivable to her that when he had offered her what she longed for, the thought of which, given to another, made her writhe with jealousy, she could have rejected it. She had repulsed him for wanting to give her what her whole heart cried out for, and what was hers, though he had already sworn it away to another. He had not met her, then ; he did not know that she was ordained for him, even as he for her. And now, just because he had promised like a child, not knowing what he promised, he was giving all that by right was hers to a girl whom he did not love.

For a moment that thought, namely, that Edith was nothing to him, assuaged her ; she might as well be jealous of a dog that he caressed and mumbled nonsense-love to, and her rage turned against herself for having been so insane as to give him scruples instead of welcome. What if she went back now into the room she had so lately left, and said to Edith, " Let him go ; you will have to let him go. It is not you he cares for ! " What if she challenged him to say which of them he chose? She knew well what his answer would be.

Inconceivable as was her folly in rejecting him,

equally inconceivable was her mood on that morning—was it only the morning of to-day?—when she walked about the dewy garden in an ecstasy of happiness at the knowledge of her love. She had thought it was sufficient to love ; it had made her happy to do that. But she had understood nothing of its nature then. It was only when she saw Brunnhilde awake to Siegfried's kiss that she had begun to understand. And the full understanding had come when Edward clasped and kissed her, and she for that moment had clung to him, only to push him away, to thrust from her just that which she wanted, which her whole soul needed. It was but a foolish fairy-tale she had told herself among the roses and sweet peas—a tale of sexless, bodiless love, fit for a Sunday School or a Bible-reading—a tale of white blossoms and white robes—a thing for children and old maids.

The Inquisition had another pair of pincers heating for her ; they were ready now, and glowing. What if his moment's heat and flash of desire for her was but the fruit of excitement, but the froth which the music had stirred up in him? Certainly it had been easy to quell it. She had but to tell him to let go of her and he obeyed ; to get out of the motor, and then he stood on the pavement. She despised his weakness, for surely a man who was in earnest, who was stirred even as she was stirred, not by some mere breeze of attraction, or by the excitement of a simulated scene, but felt the heart's need, would not have relinquished her as easily as that. Yet it looked to her in unreasoning agony that it was so, for now he was with Edith, indulging in more

madrigals, no doubt. Yet, when she thought as collectedly as might be for a second she had the cold water ready for those pincers. She knew really that what she now called his weakness was in reality of the same stuff as her own strength ; that which made her strong—that grotesque angular old image called " Honour "—was one with the reason of his yielding to her. She was left alone with that now ; next door a precisely similar idol presided over the two whom she raged to think upon.

Yet, if he had not so easily succumbed to her strength, or if, to put it more truthfully, if they had not both been held in by the force that restrained the hot impulse, that governed, that laid cool hands on the reins he had flung away, would she, so she asked herself now, have continued to persist, have ranged her will and purpose against his, till there was no more courage left in her? She did not know ; swift and decisive though the struggle had been, it seemed to have taken all the force of which she was capable to make it at all.

For the moment there was remission for her at the hands of her jealousy, and she walked across to the window and stood behind the curtain looking out on to the moon-emblazoned river. The flood-tide was at its height, and the reflection of the lights from the farther bank lay on the lake-like surface in unwavering lines. Stars and moon burning in the blaze of an everlasting day, and something in the calm of the night, in the eternal progress of those shining worlds, gave her a momentary tranquillity, so that she was able to ask herself this question, on the answer to which all

depended, with a mind aloof from herself. How long her will could have held out against her love she did not know, but she knew she would not have chosen to yield.

And at that moment she had won, had she but known it, the first real battle of her life. For that moment she stood with her banner waving round her. The next she was back in the thick of the *mêlée* again, without tactics, without any sense of there being any one in command of the army she fought with, or even of herself being but a unit in an immense warfare. She felt utterly alone, struggling, yet hardly knowing why, knowing only that the odds against her seemed desperate.

CHAPTER IX

EDWARD'S ABSENCE

THE injury to Edith's ankle which, according to the authorized version, had happened on their return from the opera to the hotel, gave more trouble than she had expected, and ten days after its infliction she was still a limping pedestrian. This morning she was whiling away the half-hour that would elapse before the motor took her out with her mother, in a long chair in the strip of shade just outside the drawing-room window, with an unread paper on her knees, hearing rather than listening to Elizabeth's stormy performance on the piano. The agitation that sounded there was not confined to those musical excursions, for ever since that night at the opera there had been something about Elizabeth that her cousin would have summed up in the word "queer." Had not other circumstances and other people been "queer," too, she would probably have been content to define without analysis. As it was, she had spent a good deal of time during this last week in attempting to penetrate this queerness of Elizabeth, and seeing if it fitted in with other oddities. And she had come to the uncomfortable conclusion that they were not unconnected.

Very small phenomena—more remembered now than noticed at the time—had announced, like horns

faintly blowing, the train of circumstances that were growing peaked, like a volcano-cone, and promised eruption. Such, for instance, had been her sense that something had happened on the afternoon when Edward had interrupted Elizabeth's practising. It was barely noticeable at the time, but it tended to confirm her view of subsequent happenings, which began to take shape and substance in her mind on the evening of the opera. That night Elizabeth had been rather oddly excited, and though an excited Elizabeth was a daily, if not an hourly, phenomenon, her excitement then had been of peculiar texture. Though not given to similes, it had represented itself, quaintly enough, to Edith's mind, under the image of Elizabeth holding some young living thing—a puppy or a kitten—down in a bucket of water to drown it, while to draw off attention from her employment she had been wildly and incoherently talkative. At the time it had struck Edith that her excitement was not merely a reaction from the climax of music and drama ; she was certainly attempting to drown something, and while her tongue was voluble with vivid talk her fingers were holding something down, shrinking but resolute.

This was not wholly an affair of memory and interpretation ; the impression had been conveyed to Edith at the time, and now, taken in conjunction with other events and conclusions, it assumed the importance of a cipher, when a numeral is prefixed to it. And the numeral, without doubt, was Edward. For on the night of the opera, after Elizabeth had gone to her bedroom, Edward had lingered for a talk, and he had been as inanimate as Elizabeth had been vivid, as grey as she had

been rainbowed. He was absent-minded, preoccupied, inaccessible ; he had nothing enthusiastic or enraptured to tell her about the opera which had so stirred his companion, and yet when questioned he said that so far from being disappointed with it it had been magnificent. To her comment that Elizabeth had seemed to enjoy it, he had for reply, that "he believed she did." Half a dozen times he had tried to rouse himself, and for a few minutes had pulled himself up by muscular effort, as it were, to a normal level, but as often as he thus exerted himself he fell back again below the surface, below waves and waters. And once more her own image of Elizabeth trying to drown something occurred to her. Then, again, Edward would ask after her injured ankle, and not listening to her reply, repeat his inquiries ; he suggested a train for their return next morning to Heathmoor, having himself arranged half an hour before they were to drive down in his car. Finally, Edith, half-amused, half-piqued with him, had told him that whether he knew it or not, he was tired, and had better follow Elizabeth's example and go to bed. For a few minutes after that he had roused himself to the performance of the little loverlike speeches, the touches and hints of their relationship. It had never been the habit of either to be demonstrative, but to-night these attentions seemed to her purely mechanical things, wooden and creaking, not the result of the fatigue with which she had saddled him.

Since that night, instead of seeing him, as she was accustomed to do, every evening on his return from town, she had not once set eyes on him. He had telephoned next day that stress of business

kept him that night in London (a thing that occasionally happened) but the same stress of business, it appeared, had prevented his coming down to his house next door ever since. A Sunday had intervened, and he had merely told her that he was engaged to pay a week-end visit, and this morning a further note had come, saying that a similar engagement prevented his coming down on the Saturday that was at hand. It was true that he had written to her with frequent regularity, for every morning presented her with a note from him, but those communications were of the most unsatisfactory description, with perfunctory regrets for his continued absence, and perfunctory assurances of the imperativeness of the employments which detained him. Once he had said that the hot weather had pulled him down from the usual serenity of his health, and visited him with headaches, but her inquiry and sympathy on this point had brought forth no further allusion to it. He was still staying at the Savoy Hotel, for while work was so heavy it was not worth while getting to Heathmoor late in the evening, only to leave by the early train in the morning. This, he said, would only add further fatigue to a fatiguing day. And he had clearly written in, between lines, "I should not set eyes on you, even. How is your ankle?"

These notes, as has been mentioned, arrived with regularity, but they were not the only communications received at Arundel from him. Twice, to Edith's knowledge, Elizabeth had heard from him, and, allowing herself now to suspect everything and everybody, Edith imagined that her cousin had heard oftener than that. For the early post was

delivered at the house an hour before breakfast-time, and was sent up to the rooms of its various destinations. But a week ago now, Edith, by chance, had come down before its arrival, and when it came had sorted it out herself and seen the neat unmistakable handwriting ; and to-day, in obedience to a definite jealousy and suspicion, she had come down early again, and again found that Edward had written to her cousin. This time, hating herself for it, yet unable to resist, she had fingered the envelope and come to the conclusion that there were certainly two sheets in it. To neither of these letters had Elizabeth made the slightest allusion.

There remained to colour, as it were, all these various outlined features with a general " wash " the aspect of Elizabeth, the impression of her. Of Edward she could only judge by the tenor of his notes, and in them he revealed nothing except reticence. But Elizabeth was here, her moods, her appearance, her voice, all gave information about her ; and if Edward's notes suggested reticence, Elizabeth suggested repression. It required very little knowledge of human nature (luckily for Edith, since her acquirements in that supreme branch of knowledge were of the most elementary description) to see that her mind was beset by some monstrous incubus. Often she sat silent and absorbed, and then, with an effort, would break into a torrent of broken-winged high spirits and gaiety, which presented the appearance of a fair forgery of her normal appreciative pleasure in life. Then, with equal suddenness, she would seem incapable of keeping up this spurious pageant, and in the middle of some voluble extravagance

she would sink back again into a nervous silence. More than once this change had come on the ringing of the front door bell, which, sounding in the kitchen passage, was clearly audible from the garden. Not once or twice only in this last week had Edith seen her drop suddenly into a restless silence when this innocent harbinger was heard, while with eager and shrinking anxiety she watched beneath dropped eyelids for the appearance of a visitor. Sometimes some such would appear and Elizabeth would soon make an excuse for a visit to the house or a conjecture as to the arrival of the post.

Now up till the moment of her falling in love with Edward, Edith's potentialities for jealousy had remained practically dormant and sealed up in her nature, the reason presumably being that she had not cared enough about anybody to be able to wake that green-eyed monster, three-quarters fiend and one-quarter angel, from its hibernation. For though jealousy is a passion which at first sight seems wholly ugly and contemptible, it must not be forgotten that its very existence postulates the pre-existence among its ancestors of love. Love, we may say, represents one of its grandparents; it is always of that noble descent. Or, if it be argued that a passion so utterly mean is wholly lacking in the open-hearted trust which so emphatically is in the essence of love, it must at least be conceded that love is in the hand that turns the key or breaks the seal of the cell where jealousy lies confined, then flings open the door to let the wild and secret prisoner escape and roam. The love that is lofty, that seeks not its own, will no doubt

wring its hands in despair to see what sort of intruder it has set loose, will use its best efforts, shocked at the appearance of this monster, to confine it again ; but without love never has jealousy been allowed to get free, to root about among the springing crops of the heart, devouring, trampling, spoiling. And in Edith's case her love had from the first come mixed with the sense and pride of possession ; its first act, while yet new-born, was to set guards round its treasure, sentinels to watch. To-day they were wide-eyed and alert.

From inside the drawing-room came the sound of the galloping squadrons of chord and scale and harmony ; Brahms was working up to one of his great intellectual crises with an attack thought out, brilliantly manœuvred, before delivering the irresistible assault. Then quite suddenly the music entirely ceased in the middle of a bar, and there was dead silence. For half a second Edith conjectured the turning of a page, but the half second grew and grew, and it was clear that it was no such momentary halt as this that had been called. Simply, Elizabeth had finished, had broken off in the middle.

An idea, an explanation leaped into Edith's mind, suggested to her by one of her green-eyed sentinels, and in her present mental condition, sapped as it was by the secret indulgence of a week's jealousy, she was unable to resist testing the accuracy of her conjecture as she was to resist the demands of her lungs for air. But in pursuance of her object she waited without moving until the pulse in her clenched hand had throbbed a hundred beats. Then very quietly she got out

of her chair and went softly in through the open garden door into the drawing-room.

Elizabeth was sitting with her back towards her at the writing-table that stood at the far end of the room. As Edith entered the swift passage of her pen ceased, and she sat with her head resting on one hand, thinking intently. Then, taking it up again, she began writing once more. Edith had seen enough for her present purpose, and she took an audible step forward. Instantly Elizabeth turned round, and as she turned she shut the blotting-book on her unfinished letter.

"Oh, how you startled me!" she said. "I thought somehow you had gone out driving with Aunt Julia."

Edith sat down.

"No, the car has not come round yet," she said. "It will be here in a minute. We shall pass the post-office; I will post your letter for you."

Elizabeth turned farther round in her chair, but her hand still lay on the closed blotting-book.

"Oh, I was only just beginning a scribble to father!" she said. "It will not be ready."

Edith considered the days of the week; but she felt that she knew it was not to her father that Elizabeth was writing.

"It will just catch the mail if I post it for you," she said. "Otherwise it will have to wait another week."

"Then it must wait another week," said Elizabeth.

Jealous people never themselves feel the wantonness and cruelty of their unconfirmed suspicions; they only know that these are not suspicions at all, but certainties.

"I noticed that you had a letter from Edward again this morning," she said.

Elizabeth slightly shifted the blotting-book, and Edith registered the fact—for so it seemed to her—that the letter was lying there.

"Again?" said Elizabeth.

Edith felt that she was not being wise. But jealousy is of all passions the most pig-headed; it only says "I must know, I must know!"

"Yes, you heard from him a week ago."

Elizabeth, who had been startled by her cousin's entry, was cool enough now. She perfectly understood what prompted this catechism. But little did Edith know how gallant a battle was being fought on her behalf by the girl whom she now so utterly distrusted and suspected; little also did she know that which Elizabeth was using her whole strength to conceal.

Elizabeth laughed; she meant to laugh, anyhow; the effort might pass for a laugh.

"Yes, I believe I did," she said. "And as for that, I rather fancy you have been hearing from him every day."

"Naturally. Did he say in his letter to you when he expected to come down here again? He has not told me that."

"No, he did not mention it, as far as I remember. He appears to be very busy."

"He appears to have time to write very long letters to you!" said Edith, hatred and resentment flashing out. Till that moment she had not known that she hated her cousin.

Elizabeth opened her blotting-book, took out of it her unfinished letter, and from under it Edward's. She slipped them into a piece of music

that lay there, and, holding it in her hand, stood up and left the table.

"What do you know about the length of his letter to me?" she asked.

Edith saw her mistake. The instinct that said "I must know, I must know!" had been wonderfully ill-inspired in its notions of how to find out.

"I happened to take it up; it was a thick letter," she said, hopelessly trying to efface her steps, giving as reason an irrational excuse.

"I don't know the thickness of Edward's letter to you," said Elizabeth. "It is no concern of mine how many sheets he writes you."

She paused a moment.

"You speak as if you resent Edward's writing to me at all," she added.

Edith saw that she could get at nothing in this way. Swiftly and unexpectedly she shifted her attack, answering Elizabeth's comment by another question.

"Why does he keep away from Heathmoor?" she said.

Elizabeth had not been expecting anything of this kind. She winced as from a blow, and had to wait a moment before she could trust her voice to be steady.

"Has he not told you?" she asked. "I thought it was work during the week, and a couple of visits for the Sundays that he is away."

Two instincts were dominant in Edith—love and jealousy, inextricably intertwined, disputing for mastership. Love and its yearning anxiety—a cord, so to speak, of which jealousy held the other end, pulled her here.

"But it's so strange of him," she said; "and his letters are strange! I don't understand it at all. Can't you help me to understand, Elizabeth? You are so much cleverer than I! Has it anything to do with music?"

There was no mistaking the sudden and piteous sincerity of her tone. Half a minute ago she had been all anger, all hate, all suspicion. Now she appealed to her whom she had hated and suspected.

Elizabeth felt her eyes grow suddenly dim.

"If I were you, I wouldn't worry, Edith!" she said. "I should be quiet, not let my thoughts run away with me, and—and trust that everything is all right."

"Then there is something wrong?" asked Edith.

"I didn't say that. I didn't mean to imply it. Take it that he is busy, that he has visits he feels he must pay. Why should he conceal things from you? Why should you assume there is anything to conceal?"

Edith instinctively shrank from making the direct accusation which all this week her jealousy had been dinning in her ears so that her head rang with it. Elizabeth would simply deny it, but it would put her on her guard (here jealousy was busy to prompt) and the chance of finding out more would be lost. Her emotion had narrowed and enfeebled the scope and power of thought; she could make no plan.

"I am very unhappy," she said simply.

Elizabeth took a step towards her.

"I am sorry for that, dear," she said. "But—but don't make yourself unhappy. Don't contribute to it."

The expected summons came, and even as the wheels of the motor crunched the gravel Lind sounded the gong and Mrs. Hancock entered. The household books had proved at least a sovereign less than she had expected, also the coral necklace with the pearl clasp had come back from the jeweller's in its new case, with Edith's initials on it. She felt that these two delightful phenomena were somehow dependent on each other; the money she had spent on the new case seemed to be returned to her by the modesty of the household books.

"Dearest, are you ready?" she asked Edith. "Let us start at once and we can go round by the old mill. And what delicious tunes you have been playing, Elizabeth, my dear. Edward will think you have got on when he hears you again. Why, you hardly limp at all this morning, Edith! I knew that the lotion I gave you last night would make you better."

Mrs. Hancock settled herself among her cushions. She had lately got a new one, rather stiff and resisting, which admirably supported the small of her back. The footstool from the stores continued to give complete satisfaction.

"And such a lovely day!" she said. "Just not too hot! Oh, what a jolt, and yet I hardly felt it at all with my new cushion. I see there has been a dreadful accident in a Welsh colliery. So sad for the poor widows and families! What a lot of misery there is in the world. But, as Mr. Martin says, we should not dwell on it too much, for fear of dimming our sense of thankfulness for all our blessings. And Edward? Have you heard from Edward? When is that naughty boy coming

back? You will have to scold him, dear, for neglecting you while he absorbs himself in making money. There ! Did you not hear the cuckoo just say ' Cuck '?—there is a rhyme about it. Yes, Edward is really quite greedy, stopping up in London like this to make money. Yet, after all, dear, you must consider that he is working for you, making himself rich for you."

Edith turned round sharply, so sharply, in fact, that her mother was startled, for sudden movements were not characteristic of her.

" Do you really think that is all, mother? " she said. " And if so, how about the Sundays? He was not here last Sunday, and he is not coming down for next Sunday."

" But what do you mean, Edith? " asked Mrs. Hancock. " You have not had a quarrel or anything? "

What Edith could not say to her cousin was possible now.

" No, we have not quarrelled," she said. " But what if he doesn't even care to quarrel? What if he has ceased to care at all? Or "—it came out with difficulty—" or if he cares for somebody else? "

Mrs. Hancock was sufficiently disturbed not to call attention to another cuckoo, that, in defiance of the rhyme, was still gifted with complete speech.

" But what a wild and dreadful idea ! " she said. " Have you any reason for supposing so? "

So far could Edith go. But she could not tell her mother that she had definite suspicions that affinities, attractions had begun to exert their force between her lover and Elizabeth. The chief feeling that kept her silent was pride. The confession

would be humiliating; she would be acknowledging herself as having failed to feed the affection she had inspired. Her love for him, genuine though it was, and the best of which her nature was capable, was not large enough to make her drown herself. She still kept her own head above water, not guessing that it is through the drowning, the asphyxiation of self, that the full life of love is born. A second cause of reticence, less dominant, was her belief in Edward's loyalty. It was overlaid with suspicion, which, ivy-like, covered it, and thrust pushing tendrils between the stones of its solidity, but beneath all this rank growth it was still there. She did not yet quite soberly believe all that she suspected. She sat silent a moment, to her mother's huge discomfort, weighing her pride in the balance and confusing it with her loyalty.

"If it were not for his absence I should not have any reason," she said. "But I don't understand his absence."

The gospel according to Mr. Martin was of the greatest assistance on this point.

"Then, my dear, dismiss it altogether," said Mrs. Hancock, with relief. "Why, it was that very point that Mr. Martin spoke of last Sunday. Ah! I remember; you could not go to church because of your ankle. But he told us that we ourselves were responsible for most of our own unhappiness, and that if we only determined to feel cheerful and thankful we should find the causes of thankfulness being multiplied round us. Was it not a coincidence that he preached on that very subject? One can hardly call it a coincidence; indeed, one feels sure there must have been some

purpose behind it. What lovely sunshine, is it not? And there is the old mill. So picturesque! Tell Denton to stop a moment and let us look at it."

A pause was made for the contemplation of this particular cause for thankfulness, and Mrs. Hancock put up her parasol to temper the other.

"Well, that is nice!" she said. "Shall we drive on? I have never heard Mr. Martin more convincing and eloquent, and I'm sure he practises what he preaches, for he has always got a smile and a pleasant word for everybody. So dismiss it all from your mind, dear, and I'll be bound you will find Edward coming down here before many days are past, just the same as ever, showing how right Mr. Martin is, for your cheerfulness will be rewarded. I see nothing odd in his having to stop up in town all the week; and as for his going away for a couple of Sundays to see his friends, what could be more natural? You would not wish him to be without friends, I am sure, or to shirk the claims of friendship. And since you said that his absence was your only ground for your dreadfully foolish idea, I think we may consider that we've disposed of that. Now let us look about us and enjoy ourselves. Oh, there's a windmill! How its sails are going round!"

Mrs. Hancock cast a slightly questioning glance at her daughter to see if Mr. Martin's wonderful prescription was acting at once, like laughing-gas, and, finding that Edith still sat serious and silent, proceeded to administer other fortifying medicines.

"He has often told us to busy ourselves with plans and thoughts for others," she said. "And

there, again, how he practises what he preaches: he has had the dining-room repapered, since Mrs. Martin thought it was a little gloomy, and has given her the most beautiful new carpet for her sitting-room. And I'm sure I've never been happier in my life than this summer, with all your future, dear, to plan and scheme for, and with Elizabeth as well to think about. I must say I haven't had a moment to think about myself, even if I had wanted to."

Her kind face beamed with such smiles as Mr. Martin considered to be symptomatic of the Christian life.

"I've got a plan about Elizabeth," she said, "though it's a secret yet. But I should like to tell you about it. I am thinking of making a proposal to Elizabeth and suggesting that she should not go back to India as early as October. There is no great affection between her and her stepmother, and I expect she often feels very lonely and unhappy there, with no music and, as far as I can judge, only soldiers to talk to. Dear Elizabeth! I think she is enjoying our quiet life at Heathmoor. I dare say that after those dreadful wildernesses and jungles in India it seems to her one round of excitement and pleasure and parties and operas, all given her free. Indeed, I have a further plan still, which will make her quite wild with pleasure, I am sure. I am thinking of asking her to come with me to Egypt, and I have written to ask Uncle Bob about it, just to see if he will allow it before I say anything to her. Of course, he would pay for her journey—and, indeed, it is all on the way to India—and her hotel expenses. But I should not dream of charging her for her

share of our sitting-room, if we have one. I shall go shares with Edward in that, and I dare say the servants at the hotel would not expect her to tip them!"

Mrs. Hancock's plans for other people always necessitated a certain amount of interpretation; it was important to look at them from her point of view. Here the interpretation was easy. It had occurred to her that she would be rather lonely when Edith and Edward left after their marriage, and that in Egypt it would be pleasant to have somebody in constant attendance on her, since the other two, presumably, would want to make all kinds of expeditions that she herself might not care to join in. She liked Elizabeth's vitality and fervour, finding it stimulating. This point she touched on next.

"I declare Elizabeth is as good as a tonic," she said, "with all her high spirits and gaiety, though for the last ten days she has not been quite so lively. I dare say it is the hot weather, though, to be sure, she ought to be used to that. Here we are, on the heath again. We shall be at home in ten minutes. How quickly we have come! Well, my darling, I do think I have managed to disperse your clouds for you this morning. I don't think Edward's absence will give you any more anxiety now that we have talked so fully about it. There is nothing like talking a thing thoroughly over. You will see that it will not be long before his stress of work is finished. Perhaps he is making quantities and quantities of money, for I hear that sometimes on the Stock Exchange people make fortunes in quite a short time. Would not that be exciting?"

Mrs. Hancock, as has been seen, had a great belief in the imitative instinct, which she interpreted by means of her own. To her it meant that if she herself felt thoroughly content and happy, it was certain that those round her would feel happy too, for she diffused happiness. In the same way, if she felt very well she knew that she diffused a spirit of health. It was a comfortable belief (like all the clauses of her creed), and she would have been quite incredulous if she had been told that all she had done was to accentuate Edith's suspicions by her allusion to Elizabeth's diminished liveliness, and to depress her thoroughly at the thought of Elizabeth joining them on the Egyptian tour. And had Edith known how Elizabeth had been spending this last hour while her mother had been so rich in unconvincingness, she would have known how solid her suspicions really were.

The girl had gone up to her bedroom after the motor had started in order to be secure against any further interruption, and had again read through the letter she had received from Edward that morning, which, as Edith had ascertained, contained two sheets. She heard his voice in the pleading sentences ; it seemed to her as she read, with eyes that ever and again were too dim to decipher the words, that he was actually talking to her. And she could not interrupt him, argue with him as she would have done if he had been here ; she had to fight the cumulative effect of those close-written lines. He besought her to allow him to come down, for it was at her instance that he stayed away, and tell Edith all. He scouted as childish the idea that absence could make any difference, that he could forget what she had called " the

excited madness of that evening." Above all, again and yet again, with a lover's clamorous iteration, he begged her to see him.

Elizabeth sat with this letter in front of her for a long time after she had finished reading and re-reading it, letting her tears have their way with her. In strange guise had the soft god come to her, girt about with bitterness and impossibilities. She raged at herself for loving him ; she reviled this torturing demon that others found so sweet, but how she longed for the changed, transfigured aspect that he burned to show her. Once, for mere relief of heart, she filled a page with scrawled words of love, only to tear it up again, and once she filled another page with useless denials, with cold assertions that Edward was nothing to her, that she was perfectly indifferent to him. That, too, was fruitless ; he knew she loved him, and even if she could have convinced him that it was not so, she could not have brought herself so to convince him, to deny the most sacred truth that she had ever known. She could no more have done that than she could accept the love which brought misery on another and rose from the ashes of a broken promise. If there was no binding force in loyalty all ties were dissolved.

After a while her sobs grew quieter, and she tore up the letter she had begun to him when Edith, that morning, had come in from the garden. Till then, Elizabeth had not known that her cousin suspected anything, that she had begun to put the real construction on Edward's absence. Now it was necessary to quiet those suspicions, to let Edward know also, in a way she could not convey by letter, that while Edith claimed his promise, that

promise could not be broken for any reason whatever. Nothing in the world seemed so certain as this. Edith must voluntarily give him up before . . . Then she carefully erased that sentence. That contingency was not to be thought of yet.

Elizabeth felt utterly weary and confused and heart-sick. Obstacles, menacing and monstrous, faced her in whichever direction she turned. Perhaps Edward's presence would only confirm and strengthen Edith's suspicions, and lead her to the certainty which she suspected. Yet if Edward continued to be absent, that would lead to a break on his side, at his initiative, and it was that above all that must be avoided. If he threw her over, said he could not marry her, the hosts of hell and heaven combined would not be able to bring Elizabeth to him. She could not take what by right was Edith's against Edith's will. It was possible, and more than possible, that Edith might see he did not love her, and not release him only, but bid him begone. And yet Edward had never loved her, while she, loving him in her own manner, had been content with his liking and friendly intimacy. When she knew that his heart had been awakened, but not for her, would she still desire that moonlight, when his sun had risen on another land? Elizabeth, as she finished her letter to Edward, felt that she had not the slightest idea.

The letter got written, and no word of tenderness or love appeared in it ; it might have been penned by some fossil of a family friend and written in prehistoric ink, for if she had not written like that there was but one other way in which she could write to him, and she would have said, " I am

coming to you." The thinnest partition, but a partition the most impenetrable, insulated her from him. On this point her will stood utterly firm. In this short, dry note she did not attempt to argue the question ; she merely told him that he must come down at once, and put an end to Edith's intolerable suspicions. "But for you to break your engagement to her will not bring me one step nearer you," were the concluding words. Whether she was acting wisely or not, whether there was not some step she could take later that would be cleverer, more tactful, she could not consider. The situation was simple enough, and they had to wait for Edith to decide its solution.

The thing was done ; that cold, hard little sentence that finished her letter was written. All this last week of his absence she had wondered whether her will would stand firm enough to enable her to tell him that, and to make no other answer to his pleading. She knew that when he came down, as he assuredly would on the next day, she would be obliged to see him, to let him in justice state the case for himself. But she had now her own word to bind her ; she would be able, by memory, to recapture the spirit of the moment when she wrote it. It was her definite decision, and the knowledge of it would fortify her. She would need it, she felt, when she was face to face with him and her overwhelming need of him.

A resolution taken and embedded in the mortar of fact always gives relief, even if a death-sentence is involved in it. The acute edge of suspense is removed, and when Elizabeth, having posted her letter, strolled out again into the garden, she was conscious of a certain tranquillity, to which for

the last ten days she had been an utter stranger. She did not suppose that there was anything more than a lull in the tempest ; she knew that it must again howl and buffet round her, but even as on the night after the opera, she had felt a momentary calm as she looked at the moonlit flood-tide, so now she was given another respite. But now she felt securer ; she had gained a little ground, she could look out over the contention and estimate the odds against her as less desperate.

It was just here she had walked on the dewy morning, in ecstasy of unreflecting happiness, when the instinct to give thanks to Some One first came to her. To-day she saw the triumphant riot of midsummer under a noonday sun, and she, no less than the garden, was surrounded by the burden and heat. The dew and freshness had faded from the cool petals, and the heavy heads of the roses drooped on their stems. But with brimming eyes and bitten lip she encouraged herself to exhibit a sturdier pluck than they. She would not yield, she would not hang her head, she would, whatever the issues might be, be grateful to the power that had come into her soul, the power to love. Ignorantly, ten days ago, she had thought that sufficient ; now, with greater knowledge, she wondered whether her ignorance had not told her right, after all. Then it seemed to matter nothing so long as she loved ; now, just for a little while, she knew it mattered nothing. She caught a glimpse, as of snow-peaks behind storm-clouds, of a reality so lofty, so serene, that she almost distrusted her eyes.

Suddenly her mind sped on its magic flight to the low white house at Peshawar, from which so

often she had lifted her eyes up through the heat-haze to the quivering lines of eternal snows, to the steadfast peaks that rose above all dust and storm-cloud, and she smiled as she recognized by what association of ideas her mind had winged its way thither. The gardens there would be withered in the heat, but she yearned for the scene where life had been so unperplexed. Above all, she yearned for her father, who even now retained the simplicity of youth ; she yearned for his comradeship, his wisdom, his patience, his sympathy. She could have told him all the trouble so easily and confidently ; she could hear him say, "Lizzie, dear, I am so sorry, but, of course, you had to do just what you did." She could have argued with him, taking the side of her longing and love, telling him that nothing could be counted or reckoned with against the fact that she and Edward loved each other. And again she could hear him say, "My dear, I know you don't think that really." And then she could have said, "No, no, I don't mean it," and have sobbed her heart out against that rough homespun jacket which he wore in the garden.

The garden ! At the end was a low wall, over which one night she had vaulted, when, just outside, lay the dying Brahmin, to whom a beggar's death by the wayside, needy, indigent, was a triumph that transcended all telling, was the finding of that which all his life he had sought. His eyes, already dim in death, were open not upon death, but life. He had renounced all the fair things that the world offered to find something infinitely fairer. Round him, tired, hungry, dying, the banner of some stupendous triumph waved.

How had he reached that? By seeking.

And how had he sought? By renunciation.

And what had he found? Life.

The moment had worn the vividness and splendour of a dream, and Elizabeth was again conscious of the heavy-headed flowers and the noonday heat. The wheels of the motor scraped on the gravel sweep at the other side of the house, and in another minute she would be plunged back in the deeds and the needs of every day. But she no longer felt so utterly alone and desolate ; far behind the storm she had seen the snows, and for a moment the moonlight had shone on the face of the dying Brahmin. There was some tie between them all, something that expressed itself in the peace of the great silence, and in the vision of the dying eyes, and—was she not right in hoping?—in the choice she had just made. There was one thread running through them, there was a factor common to them all.

And here was Mrs. Hancock coming into the garden.

" My dear, is it wise to be out in this sun without a hat? " she asked. " You have had a nice quiet time for your practising, haven't you? I was telling Edith that I felt sure Edward would think you had got on, when he comes down here again."

CHAPTER X

EDWARD'S RETURN

ELIZABETH'S letter to Edward had pressed upon him an immediate return to Heathmoor, at the cost of his week-end engagement, if such existed. To them both the desire of their hearts for each other had been revealed on that night of the opera, as chaos suddenly made manifest by a flash of lightning, and on all considerations it had been more decent and wise that he should absent himself. But, as Elizabeth had foreseen, this absence could not indefinitely continue, since it implied absence from Edith as well as herself, and was but of the nature of a temporary measure, to give breathing-space and time for reflection. She had told him, but not with confidence, that absence would restore his legitimate allegiance ; poor girl, she had but little trust herself in the mildness of that prescription, which was, so to speak, but a dose where the knife was called for. In any case, Edith's revealed suspicions had rendered his return necessary. Whatever the solution of that knot into which the heart-strings of three young folk were tangled, it must be dealt with by his presence here.

For both girls the interval before he could answer, whether his reply was an argued negative to Elizabeth or an affirmative announcement to

Edith, passed in acute discomfort, that rose and fell, like the ebb and flow of the physical pain of some deep-seated mischief, into crises of anguish and numb reactions. There was not an employment, there was scarcely a topic of conversation that did not conduct them sooner or later to an impassable road, where was a red flag and a danger signal. The hours passed in broken conversation and aching silences, with Edith sentinelled about by her fears and jealousies, Elizabeth torn with longings, and hearing amid the troubled peace of her renunciation voices that accused her of bitter cruelty to herself and to him and poured scorn on the tragic folly of her refusal. Twenty times that day she felt she could barely resist the need of telegraphing to him, cancelling her letter, and, acceding to his imperative desire, of simply taking the next train up to town, going to him, and saying, "I have come." But her will renounced him still, and her will still dominated her deeds. And all the time she knew that Edith watched her with sidelong glances that were quickly removed when her own eyes met them. Sometimes it seemed that Edith must speak, so intense was the miserable strain, but she always shied away at the last moment. Over those palpitating duellists, who never quite came to blows, presided Mrs. Hancock, unconscious and bland, foolish and voluble. She had experienced a moment's discomfort this morning, when Edith spoke to her of Edward's continued absence, but, as Mr. Martin would have her do, she dismissed it with complete success from her mind, telling herself that she had quite cleared it all up, and made Edith comfortable again. The obvious constraint that hung over the two girls

she merely refused to admit into her mind. It might batter and ring at the door, and there was no need for her even to open that door a chink, and assert that she was out. She sat and knitted at her crossovers, and in the evening played patience, refusing to hear the signals of distress and trouble. Next day came a telegram from Edward to Edith announcing his arrival at half-past seven that evening, and asking, or rather supposing, that he might dine with them. It was delivered at lunch-time, and Edith, as she tore it open, glanced at Elizabeth opposite, and saw the sudden whiteness of her face, saw that she sat with her fork half-raised to her lips, then put it back on her plate again, that she waited with hand pressed to the table to control its trembling. His message gave rise to debate, for Mrs. Hancock and Edith were engaged to dine at the Vicarage that night, and a small solitary dinner had already, three hours before, been ordered for Elizabeth. There was to be a slip, a lamb cutlet—quite enough and not too much.

"Of course, it would be natural," said Mrs. Hancock, "to ask him to come and have a little dinner with you, dear Elizabeth, and then you could amuse yourselves by playing to each other afterwards till Edith and I returned. And then Edith and I could have made an excuse to get away perhaps at ten, or even five minutes before. But now your dinner is ordered ; it is very provoking, and Mrs. Williams——"

Edith interrupted, watching Elizabeth narrowly. Her jealousy seemed to have divided itself into two camps. Part (and for the moment this was the stronger) allied itself with this scheme ; if Eliza-

beth and Edward had an evening together, things (if there were things) would declare themselves ; there would be an answer to that eternal question, " I want to know ; I want to know ! "

" That's a delightful plan, mother," she said ; " and surely Mrs. Williams has got some cold beef. Edward says nobody can need more than plenty of cold beef for dinner. He and Elizabeth will enjoy an evening together ; they will talk over the opera and play. And we shan't be obliged to hurry back from the Martins'."

This rather diabolical speech hit its mark. Elizabeth blushed furiously as she heard the yapping bitterness in Edith's voice. And it was not only with the rush of the conscious blood that her face flared ; anger flamed at the innuendo, the double meanings.

" In fact, I needn't reply to Edward's telegram at all," said Edith, " and he will naturally come here for dinner."

Elizabeth looked up at her cousin. At the moment she completely and fervently hated her.

" Oh, that wouldn't do, Edith ! " she said. " Edward would come over here all anxiety to see you, and find only me. He would be horribly disappointed and make himself very disagreeable. I shouldn't wonder if he went straight back to London again."

That was the first pass of the naked swords between them ; yesterday they had not come to the touch of the steel, and the first bout was distinctly in Elizabeth's favour. Elizabeth had not parried only, she had attacked. And yet it was only with foolish words that could not wound that she had thrust. Had Edith only known, her

cousin was fighting for her with a loyalty that was as divine as it was human, and calling on the loyalty of her lover to be up in arms. But her assault, with its sharp double meaning, only gratified a moment's laudable savagery and she instantly turned to her aunt.

"Oh, Aunt Julia," she said, "I should so like an evening alone. Do tell Edward you are out; he can be here all Sunday. I want to write to Daddy and I want to practise. Not play, but practise."

"Well, it would put Mrs. Williams out," said Mrs. Hancock, "to know that she had to provide dinner for Edward as well, for as for letting him eat nothing but cold beef, I think she would sooner leave my service than do that. Edward is a great favourite with Mrs. Williams. Indeed, where she would get provisions I don't know, for it's early closing, and even such shops as we have here are shut. I think your plan is the best, dear, and your father wouldn't like not to hear from you, and then there's your practice as well. I'll write a note to him. Has everybody finished? And which of you would like to drive with me this afternoon?"

Elizabeth, conscious of her own loyalty, did not in the least mind having another thrust at her cousin. Edith had provoked her; Edith should take the consequences—the superficial ones. She turned to her.

"It will be a good punishment for Edward," she said, "to find that you are out. You will be paying him back in his own coin for keeping away so long. Perhaps he will come round after you get back. If I were you I should say I was tired and would not see him."

Edith looked at her with her real anxiety, making anxious, imploring signals. Elizabeth saw and disregarded them.

"Of course, it would be the worst punishment of all for him," she said, "if you let him come round expecting to find you and he found only me alone with my lamb-cutlet. But you mustn't punish him as much as that, Edith. It would be too cruel."

Mrs. Hancock had passed out of the dining-room on the quest for the longer paragraphs in the *Morning Post*, and for a moment the two girls faced each other. Elizabeth was still quivering with indignation at Edith's first wanton attack, the attack which sounded so friendly and pleasant a salutation and which both knew was so far otherwise. And if Edith only knew what wrestlings, what blind strivings after light Elizabeth had undergone for her. . . .

"Don't scold him too much," she said. "He is so nice. I love Edward! Shall I drive with Aunt Julia this afternoon, or would you like to?"

Elizabeth ran upstairs to her room and locked herself in. Already she was sick at heart for her barren dexterity. She had pricked Edith with her point, made her wince, startled her into miserable silence. And what was the good of it all? It did not even for the moment allay the savage anguish of her own wound. She threw herself on her bed and sobbed.

By soon after eight she had finished her dinner and was sitting in the drawing-room, neither writing to her father nor practising. For the last half-hour she had had one overpowering sensation in her mind, which absorbed the active power

of thought, and spread itself like a dense enveloping mist, obscuring all other perceptions—namely, the knowledge that in the house next door Edward sat alone, or perhaps walked in the garden, longing to catch sight of her over the low brick wall. She, too, would have spent this hour of darkening twilight outside but for fear of seeing him, or more exactly but for the longing to see him which she must starve and deny. No doubt she would have to see him, have to listen to his pleading ; but it was part of her resolve that she would use all her will to hold herself apart. But the thought of him possessed her, and she could not concentrate her mind enough even to attempt to practise or to write her overdue letter. It had taken all her nervous force to arrive where she was ; now, like a bird after the flight of migration, she had to rest, to let the time go by, without stirring up her activities ; for any activity she roused seemed to be directed from the cause of purpose that excited it, and to be sucked into the mill-race that but ran the swifter for an added volume of awakened perception.

Soon mere inactivity became even more impossible than employment, and she opened the piano. The wonder of music, which his love had so magically quickened in her, perhaps would not desert her even now, and she set herself to study the intellectual as well as the technical intricacies of Brahms' variations on the Handel themes. If she could give them any attention at all, she felt she could give them her whole attention ; it was impossible merely to paddle knee-deep in that profound and marvellous sea ; you had either to swim, or not enter it at all. She bent her mind

to her work, as a man bends the resisting strength of a bow. She would string it ; she willed that it should bend itself to its task.

How marvellous was this artistic vision ! To the composer, the theme was like some sweet, simple landscape, a sketch of quiet country with a stream, perhaps, running through it. Then he set himself to see it in twenty different ways. He saw it with gentle morning sunshine asleep over it ; he saw it congested with winter, green with the young growth of spring, triumphant in the blaze of summer, and gorgeous with the flare of the dying year. He saw it with rain-clouds lowering on its hills and swelling its streams with gathered waters ; he saw it underneath the lash of rain, and echoing to the drums of thunder ; he saw it beneath the moonlight, and white with starshine on snow.

Suddenly Elizabeth held her hands suspended over the keys, and in her throat a breath suspended. Through the maze of melody she had heard another sound, faint and tingling, that pierced through the noise of the vibrating strings. A bell had rung. Hearing it, she knew that unconsciously she had been listening for it with the yearning with which the eyes of the shipwrecked watch for a sail.

There were steps in the hall, a few words of indistinguishable talk, and she turned round on her music-stool and faced the door. It opened, whispering on the thick carpet, and Edward stood there.

In silence he held out both hands to her, and she rose. But she did not advance to him, or he to her.

She felt her lip trembling as she spoke.

"You should not have come," she said.

"You told me to come."

"But not to me. I told you to come to Edith."

He sat down in a chair near her.

"You have got to hear what I have to say," he said. "You have not heard it yet."

"Yes; you have written to me. I have answered you."

"I can't express myself in writing. I can only write symbols of what I mean."

"I understood your symbols very well. I am sure you understood mine."

It seemed to her that the real struggle had only just begun. Even as he had said, what he wrote had only been symbols compared to the awful reality of his presence. The short, sharp sentence that each had spoken rang with keen hostility; in each love was up in arms, battling, as with an enemy, for a victory that must be hard won.

"You speak as if you hated me for coming," he said. "If you do, I can't help it."

She raised her eyes to him.

"Oh, my dear, don't make it harder for me," she said. "It's hard enough already. I can't bear much more."

"I am going to make it as hard for you as I possibly can," said he. "I don't care what it costs you, so long as I convince you."

"You won't even convince me."

"I shall try my best. I believe your happiness as well as mine is at stake."

He paused a moment, and his voice, which had been low and quiet, like hers, suddenly raised itself.

"I want you!" he cried. "Oh, can you know what it means to want like that? I don't believe you can, or you could not resist. Do you realize what has happened? how, by a miracle of God-sent luck, we two have found each other? And you think that there can be an obstacle between us! There can't be! There is nothing in the world that is real enough to come between us. You do love me. I was wrong when I said I didn't believe you knew what it meant to want. When, for one moment, you clung to me, you knew. You were real then; you were yourself. But since then you have held up a barrier between us. I am here to tear it down."

"You can't tear it down," said Elizabeth.

"You shall tear it down yourself. I didn't know what love meant when I got engaged to Edith; that was because I hadn't seen you. Oh, I know, two years ago I had set eyes on you, but I hadn't seen you. It was obvious that I couldn't love just because I hadn't seen you. I couldn't unlock my heart without the key. And you were the key. Elizabeth, oh, Elizabeth, I worship you! Oh, my darling, what is the use of torturing me as you have been doing during these awful days! You won't go on—you won't!"

He had left his chair and was kneeling before her, with his hands clasped together on her lap. As he had said, his written words were but symbols compared to the reality; they were but as pictures of flames compared to the burning of authentic fire, as splashes of paint compared to actual sunshine. She could not speak just yet; only with the quivering semblance of a smile and eyes that were bright with tears could she answer him. But

she did not shrink from him, nor move, and she laid her hands on his.

"Edward!" she said at last, and again, "Edward!"

Against some inward weight of unacknowledged conviction he allowed himself to hope, and, bending, he kissed the hands that lay on his. Not now, even, did she shrink, for she could not. It was as much as she could do not to respond. And she could not respond.

"You see, then?" he whispered. "At last you see!"

He looked up and faced the tender, inexorable love in her eyes.

"I see more clearly than ever," she said. "Please, dear, don't interrupt me. Not by word or by look even. I can't marry you unless—unless Edith voluntarily gives you up. I can't. I can't accept love that can be mine only through your disloyalty, through your breaking a promise you have given. And I can't let you take my love on those terms. It would kill love; it would kill the most sacred thing there is. No; loyalty is as sacred. And you mustn't ask her to set you free. Love can only give, only give—it cannot ask for itself."

He got up, wild with impotent yearning, inflamed to his inmost fibre.

"But are you flesh and blood!" he cried, "or are you some—some unsubstantial phantom that does not feel?"

She rose also with fire of loyalty to meet his fire of passion, and flung out her words with a strength that more than matched his violence.

"No, I am flesh and blood," she said, "and

you know that I love you. But love is holier to me than to you. I can't love you differently. We can never come together while a single thread of loyalty, of common honour, has to be snapped to let us."

He interrupted.

"Trust your heart, my darling," he said; "only trust that!"

"I do trust it. And I trust yours. You know you are battling with not me alone, but yourself. There is something within you that tells you I am right."

"My cowardice. Nothing more. My fear of unpleasant things for which my real self does not care two straws."

She shook her head at him; then advanced and laid her long hands on his shoulders.

"It is just your real self that does care," she said. "Oh, my dear, I do not mean it is your false self that loves me. But it is your false self that has been urging me to-night. Edward"—and again her lips so trembled that she could scarcely speak—"Edward, I don't want to spare you one moment of the wretchedness that has come upon us, nor would I spare myself. If we were not suffering so, we should not love so. All our suffering is part of our love. I don't know why it has happened like this, why God didn't allow us to meet sooner. And that doesn't concern us. It is so. What does concern us is not to graft our love on to disloyalty and unfaithfulness. It is in our power to do right. I can't deliberately choose to find happiness for you or for me in a crime."

"Crime!"

"Yes, the worst sort of crime, for it is one that is a crime that we should commit against each other. I don't think"—and a shadow of a smile hung round Elizabeth's mouth—"I don't think I should feel so very bad if I murdered some one whom I hate. But in this I should be murdering all that is best in the man I love."

"You are talking wildly!" he said. "Murder! What nonsense!"

"I never spoke more deliberately," said she.

Again he was stung to a frenzy of impotence.

"And you admit you love me!" he cried. "You admit it!"

"But of course. Don't—don't be so silly!"

"But I can't do it. I can't let you go!" he broke out again. "And would you have me marry Edith, you, who talk about the sacredness of love?"

Elizabeth pushed him gently away from her.

"I don't know. I haven't had room in me to think about that," she said. "It has taken me, well—all my time to think about us."

He was silent a moment.

"Do you think she will let me go, when she knows?" he asked.

"I think she does know. At least I think she guesses."

"Well?"

"I can't tell. But I think she loves you. I am sure she loves you. And it is hard to let go a person one loves."

"It's impossible!" he cried suddenly.

"She may find it so."

"I wasn't thinking of her," said he.

He stretched out his arms wide and towards her.

"Elizabeth!" he cried.

She wavered where she stood. Never yet had the balance hung so evenly, as when now he made his final appeal to her, wordless except for her own name, for into that his whole soul went. She felt dragged to him by a force almost irresistible. From him and her alike for the moment all the ties and considerations of loyalty and honour were loosed; he knew only his overmastering need, she, the intensity of a woman's longing to give herself. Had the choice been then for the first time to be made, she would have flung herself to him. But the force of the choice she had made before had already made itself firm within her.

"No, no, no!" she said, and the words were drops of blood. Then once more she had power to turn from him.

She went back to the piano to close it, and mechanically shut up the music she had been playing from. Then, though she had heard nothing, she felt that some change had come into the room. From the edge of the field of vision she saw that Edward had turned towards the door, and she looked. The door was open, and Edith stood there.

Elizabeth let the piano-lid slip from her hands, and it fell with a bang and jar of wires.

"You are back early," she said. "At least it is early, is it not? Has Aunt Julia come back?"

"No. I telephoned for the car, and left almost immediately after dinner. My ankle began to hurt again."

The reaction after her struggle had begun in Elizabeth. Though it was for Edith's advantage

she had done battle, it was not for Edith's sake, and the sight of her cousin suddenly filled her with bitter resentment. She felt perfectly sure also that this reason for her return was wholly fictitious ; she had come back like this for an entirely different purpose. Elizabeth feigned an exaggerated sympathy.

" Oh, I am so sorry," she said, " and surely, Edith, it is madness to stand like that. I am sure you are in agonies. Of course you will go to bed at once. Shall not I ring for Filson? And then I will telephone and ask Dr. Frank to come round immediately. Is it very bad? Poor dear ! But anyhow you have the pleasure of seeing Edward. You did not expect to find him here, did you? Did you? "

Goaded and self-accused of a foolish attempt at deceit, Edith turned to her.

" Yes, I did," she said. " I thought it extremely probable."

" Ah, and can it have been for the sake of finding him here as much as for the sake of your ankle, which I see you still continue to stand on, that you came back? Edward, do you hear? Edith expected to find you here. So she is not disappointed. And I'm sure her ankle feels much better."

It was scarcely possible to believe that this jeering, scoffing girl was the same who five minutes before pleaded with her lover with such womanly strength, such splendid self-repression, or that she could have thus battled for the rights of her whom she now so bitterly taunted. And indeed the mere identity of Edith was but a casual accident ; Elizabeth had ranged herself on the side of a principle

rather than the instance of it. For the rest, after the scene in which she had called upon every ounce of her moral force to aid her, she had nervously, entirely collapsed with a jar like that of the fallen piano-lid. Then her collapse spread a little farther ; the angry fire that burned in her for this pitiful subterfuge went out, and, swaying as she stood, she put her hands before her eyes.

" I'm giddy ! " she said. " I'm afraid I'm going to faint ! "

Edward took a quick step towards her, but she waved him aside and fell on to the sofa. Edith looked at her without moving.

" You will be all right if you sit still a moment," she said, " and then I think it is you who had better go to bed. As Edward is here, I want to talk to him privately. Leave her alone, Edward ; she is better left alone."

He paid no attention to this, and went to the sofa.

" Can I do anything for you? " he said. " Can't I get you some water, or some brandy? "

Elizabeth sat up.

" I shall be all right," she said. " I will just sit here a minute or two. Then I will go. Edith wants to talk to you. She—she has not seen you for so long."

Slowly her vitality returned, and with it for the second time that day the aching sense of the uselessness of her bitter, ironical words to her cousin, of the sheer stupidity of their wrangle. If Edith chose to tell a foolish tale about her ankle, it concerned nobody but herself. It did not matter, for one thing only in the world mattered. And with regard to that, for the present, she felt a total

apathy. She had done her part ; nobody, not even herself, could require anything more of her. She felt hugely and overwhelmingly tired, nothing more at all. She got up.

"I shall take your advice, Edith, and go to bed," she said. "If there is anything you want to tell me afterwards, please come up to my room. Good-night, Edward!"

Not till her steps had passed away up the stairs did either of the two others speak. Edith's face, firm, pretty, plump, showed not the slightest sign of emotion. She stood in front of the empty fire-place, waving her feather fan backwards and forwards opposite her knee, looking at it.

"I think you had better tell me what has happened," she said. "Or if you find a difficulty in doing that I will tell you. You imagine that you have fallen in love with Elizabeth."

An answer seemed superfluous. After a little pause she apparently thought so too, and went on, still in the same quiet, passionless tone.

"I have often watched you and her," she said. "She has used her music as an instrument to encourage you and draw you on——"

"That is not so!" said Edward.

"Of course you are bound to defend her. It is manly of you, and what I should expect from you. But that does not matter."

"Yes, it does matter," said he. "Throughout the fault has been entirely mine. You have got to believe that. You do not understand her at all if you think otherwise."

"I do not want to understand Elizabeth. Her nature and mine are so far apart that I do not attempt to understand her. What is perfectly clear

to me is that she knew that you and I were engaged, and she has tried to come between us. So far I understand her, and for me that is far enough."

Edward looked at her. Half an hour ago he had wondered whether Elizabeth was flesh and blood. Now he wondered if Edith was.

"You are absolutely mistaken about her," he said. "It is she who has been unswervingly loyal to you. The disloyalty has been entirely mine. I know I can't make you believe it, but it is so."

Edith met his eye looking at her steadily without tremor.

"Yes, you can make me believe it, if you ask me to release you from your engagement to me," she said. "Do you do that?"

The waving of her fan ceased as she waited for his answer. She stood absolutely still, a marvel of self-control.

"No, I don't ask that," he said. "All the same, you must believe what I tell you about your cousin."

"And if I can't?"

"I will force you to. I will tell you what happened on the night of the opera; I will tell you why I have kept away all these days. I will even show you the letter from her that brought me back. You will have to believe."

For the moment nothing seemed to matter to him except that Edith should believe this, and in the silence that followed he watched her face, and marvelled at the change that came there. It was as if it was possible to see the belief penetrating into her brain, and transforming her features, even as the thaws of the spring penetrate

into the congealed ground, softening its outlines and bedewing the spear-heads of frozen grass with moisture, that percolates and liquefies the ice-bound tussocks. Even so, Edith, frozen with jealous hate for Elizabeth, melted at the words the truth of which it was impossible to doubt, for the nature of the proofs he offered was the guarantee for them. She had to believe. And this unfreezing melted her ; the crust of her hardness was dissolved, and pitiful imperative yearnings welled up from the very springs of her, that pierced and flooded the ground that had been sealed to their outflow. As far as her will went, she banished her bitterness and blame of Elizabeth ; she was herself alone with her lover and her love, that was more adamantine than this mere frozen surface of hatred and jealousy had been. Till that crust was dissolved, the inner springs could not flow ; now it was melted and they flooded her.

Her fan dropped unregarded at her feet, and she clasped her hands together.

"I believe you," she said. "It is you who—who are responsible. But you don't ask me to release you. That is well, for—for I can't release you. You can refuse to marry me, I suppose. A man can always do that if he has made a girl love him and has asked her to marry him."

He did not answer, and she went on winding and unwinding her fingers.

"You see I love you," she said, "and I can't let you go. And only a few weeks ago you liked me enough anyhow to want me to marry you. You thought you would be very well content to live with me always. I think that was about it. And I felt much the same towards you. Then immediately,

when I found you wanted me, I began to love you. And I love you more and more. Before that nothing in the world had meant anything to me. Even if you asked me to let you go, I could not."

Still he said nothing, and she came up close to him, treading on her fan and breaking the ivory sticks of it.

"It would be simply impossible for me," she said. "Do you think that by my own act I could give you up, and let you marry Elizabeth—as I suppose you would do?"

She pointed through the open window at his house next door.

"Could I see you living there with *her*?" she asked. "Hear the gate clang as you went in on your return in the evening? See the lights lit in the house and quenched again at night, and know you were there with her, and that I had permitted it? Never, never! You can refuse to marry me, if you will; that is your affair. But don't, Edward, don't!" and her voice broke.

He felt utterly humiliated by her sudden entreaty. It was pitiful, it was intolerable that she whom he had sought light-heartedly with a view to comfort and quiet happiness and domestic peace should abase herself to him, asking that he should not withdraw so paltry a gift. He had known and liked and admired her for years, and had offered her, not knowing how cheap and shabby was his devotion, what was wholly unworthy of her acceptance. In return now she gave him unreservedly all she had, all she was capable of, only asking that his rubbish should not be taken from her.

And now as he sat there, full of cold pity for her, full of scorn for himself that he should give

her pity and be unable to give her warmth, she knelt to him, clasping his knees. And her beseeching, so grovelling, so abandoned, seemed only to degrade him. Knowing now that he knew what love was, how royal was the gift she brought him, he saw himself bankrupt and abject, receiving the supplications of some noble petitioner.

With streaming eyes and voice that choked she besought him.

"Just give me what you can, my darling," she said, "and oh, how content I will be! It is so short a time ago that you thought I could make you happy, and I can—believe me, I can. I was not worthy when you asked me first, but I have learned so much since I began to love you, and I am worthier now. You have always liked me, we have always been good friends, and you will get over this sudden infatuation for Elizabeth. I will be so good about that; I won't be jealous of her. It wasn't your fault that you fell in love with her; I will never reproach you for it. We shall be so happy together very soon; she will go back to India and you will forget. I will do anything except give you up!"

Once or twice he had tried to interrupt her, but she swept his words away in the torrent of her entreaties. But here for a moment her voice utterly choked, and he put his arm round her, raising her, dragging her from her knees. Weeping hysterically, she clung to him, burying her face on his shoulder, and all the tenderness and kindliness in his nature came to him.

"My dear, don't talk like that," he said, soothing her, "and don't cry like that. Dry your eyes, Edith; there is nothing to cry about."

"Tell me, then," she sobbed, "what are you going to do with me?"

Still with his arm about her he led her across the room to the sofa where, half an hour ago, Elizabeth had fallen. There was no possibility of choice left him, and he saw that clearly enough. He could not break a promise made to one who loved him, the strength of whose love he had not even conjectured before. Undemonstrative and reticent by nature, Edith had never yet shown him her heart, nor had he known how completely it was his. There was no struggle any more; there was left to him only the self-humiliating task of comforting her.

"God knows I will give you all I can," he said. "I will do my best to make you happy. But, my dear, don't humiliate me any more. I know that you are giving me all a woman can give a man. And it is sweet of you to forgive me; I don't deserve to be forgiven. There, dry your eyes. Let me dry them for you. Never, never, I hope, will you cry again because of me."

Edith's sobbing had ceased, and with a woman's instinct she began to repair with deft fingers the little disorder of her dress.

"Oh, I will love you so, my darling!" she whispered. "We shall be happy; I know we shall be happy. And when I give you the best gift of all, when I give you a child, and another child . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know," he said. "And how their grannie will love them!"

She shrank away from him a moment at this. He had said anything that might comfort and quiet her, which came to his tongue.

"And how we shall love them!" he added quickly. "There, you look more yourself."

Still leaning on him, as if loth to let him go, she turned her tear-stained face round to the mirror above the sofa.

"Ah, but what a fright!" she said. "I shall just go and wash my face and then come back to you. Mother will be in any minute now. And I shall look into Elizabeth's room, shall I not? She —she said she wanted to know."

The sounds of the arrival of the motor hastened her departure upstairs, and next moment Mrs. Hancock came in.

"Well, it is nice to see you, my dear!" she said. "But I can't say it's a surprise, for I told Edith I was sure you would look in. But where's Edith? And where's Elizabeth?"

Edward shook hands.

"Elizabeth went to bed half an hour ago," he said. "She was not feeling very well. Edith has just gone upstairs. She was going to look in and see how she was."

Mrs. Hancock sat down to her patience-table. She always played patience when she had been to a party, to calm herself after the excitement.

"Isn't that like my darling Edith!" she said. "Forgetting all about her ankle, I'll be bound, and even about you, though you mustn't scold her for it. She will have told you that her ankle began to pain her. Fancy! There is a second king already. Ring the bell, dear Edward, I must have a little lemonade, and no doubt you would like a whisky and soda. Another ace—how provoking!"

Mrs. Hancock had a tremendous belief in her

own perspicacity, and, looking at the young man, came to the very distinct conclusion that something had happened. His voice sounded rather odd, too. Simultaneously she caught sight of the wreck of Edith's fan on the floor. Her remarkable powers of imagination instantly enabled her to connect this deplorable accident—for Edith was usually so careful—with whatever it was that had happened. Perhaps there had been a little tiff over Edward's long-continued absence. She summoned up all her tact and all her optimism.

"Why, if that isn't Edith's fan!" she said. "She must have dropped it and stepped on it. Or it would be more like Elizabeth to step on it. And what a long time you have been away. Edith was almost disposed to blame you for that, until she and I had a good talk together. I told her it would never do for you to neglect either your business or your friends. Once Mr. Hancock was away from me for a month, when there was either a slump or a boom in the markets. Dear me, how the old words come back to one, though I'm sure I forget what they mean! Has it been a slump or a boom, dear Edward, all this last fortnight?"

"Oh, everything has been pretty quiet," said he absently. He could barely focus his attention enough on what she was saying to understand her. Upstairs Edith had gone in to see Elizabeth —to tell her what had happened——

"I see," said Mrs. Hancock, with great cordiality. "And so you have had to watch things very carefully. Such a pleasant dinner at Mr. Martin's, and a great deal of wise and witty talk. And I have such a lovely plan for Elizabeth, which

I shall tell her about to-morrow, so there's no reason why I should not tell you now. I mean to let her stay with me after you have taken my darling away, all October and November, and come with me to Egypt, so that we shall all meet again, our happy little party. I have just heard from her father, who, of course, will pay for her travelling expenses, and he is quite agreeable, if Elizabeth likes. I quite look forward to telling her; she will go mad with joy, I think, for imagine a girl seeing Egypt at her age! I am very fond of Elizabeth; she is lively and cheerful, though I think she has felt the heat this last fortnight. So affectionate, is she not? And I'm not sure she doesn't like her Cousin Edward best of all of us."

This amazing display of tactful conversation, designed to take Edward's mind off any little tiff that he might have had with Edith, demanded some kind of appreciation from him.

"I should be delighted to know that Elizabeth liked me," he said.

"You may be sure she does. Such a common interest you have, too, in music. Ah! here is Edith; and my patience is coming out in spite of that horrid ace which blocked me so long. We were talking about Elizabeth, dear, and I was telling Edward how fond she is of him."

The poor lady had touched the limit of his endurance.

"I think I must be getting to bed," he said.

"Not wait and chat while I have my lemonade? Well, dear, it is nice to see you again, and I have no doubt that Edith will see you out, and lock the door after you, so that I need not ring for Lind again. Edith, my darling, your fan!

Who could have stepped on it? Was it Elizabeth? And has your ankle ceased to pain you?"

Edward followed Edith out into the hall. There was no repressing his anxiety to know.

"Did you see her?" he asked.

"Yes. Oh, Edward, I have been wronging Elizabeth so. And I am sorry. She told me she didn't care for you, not one scrap. It—it had never entered her head. I asked her forgiveness for having had such dreadful thoughts about her. I don't know how I thought so. It has made me quite happy. You see, she never thought of you. And she kissed me and forgave me."

She lifted her face to his.

"She told me to tell you," she said. "She——"

Edward kissed her quickly and stepped out into the black, cloud-shadowed night.

CHAPTER XI

THE TELEGRAM

Mrs. Hancock was distinctly aware when, three days afterwards, she started in her motor for a drive with Elizabeth, that in order to live worthily up to Mr. Martin's pattern of the thankful, cheerful Christian life, she had to keep a very firm hand on herself and nail her smile to her pleasant mouth. Indeed, for these last few days she had to set before herself an ideal not of cheerful, but of grinning Christianity. Like a prudent manager, however, she had steadfastly saved up as an all-conquering antidote to the depression and queerness which was so marked in Elizabeth, her joyful plan that should give the girl a month more of Heathmoor and her own undivided society and a reunited tour in Egypt afterwards at Colonel Fanshawe's expense. The prospect of that, she felt sure, could not possibly fail to restore to Elizabeth her accustomed exhilaration and liveliness.

Meantime Mrs. Hancock had carefully forborne to ask either of the girls (for Edith also had exhibited symptoms of queerness) what was ailing with the serenity of life. It fitted in with the cheerful gospel to know as little as possible about worrying and annoying topics, lest their infection should mar the soothing and uplifting influence

over others of a mind wholly untroubled. Two inquiries only had she made (and those were from Edward), which elicited the comfortable fact that the event of the 8th of October still remained firm, and that he had not lost any money in the City. After that she firmly shut her eyes to any possible cause of trouble, and though one (and that the correct one) actually stood immediately in the foreground of her mental vision, she by long practice in obedience to Mr. Martin's gospel had reached a pitch of absolute perfection in the feat of mental eye-closing, even as a child frightened by the dark can by an effort of will shut out terrifying possibilities by the corresponding physical feat, or firmly bury its head under the bedclothes.

But her victory over these subtle influences of gloom and general oddity had not been gained without effort. It had been distinctly hard to maintain an equable cheerfulness with Elizabeth. Sometimes for a little the girl was quite herself with a short-lived flood of high-spirited talk; sometimes from her sitting-room Mrs. Hancock would hear a flight of brilliant song-birds on the piano. But then suddenly the flood would cease from pouring, and the flight fail in mid-air. Once just after a silence had fallen on the ringing air she had come into the drawing-room to find Elizabeth sitting with her hands still resting on the keys, and her head bowed forward over them. Her assertion that she was not ill carried conviction; her denial that anything was the matter was less easy of belief. But she said it, and since successful inquiry might lead to disturbing information, Mrs. Hancock fell back on the unimpeach-

able general duty of trusting everybody completely and in particular of believing what Elizabeth said.

But it required an effort to remain perfectly comfortable, for she was surrounded with people who did not appear to be so, and Edward, so it seemed to her, though he had lost no money and was going to marry Edith on the 8th of October, seemed to have been drawn into what she looked upon as a vicious circle—vicious since it was wrong, positively wrong, not to be happy and comfortable. She was not quick or discerning in the interpretation of symptoms, nor, indeed, when she suspected that anything was amiss, quick to see symptoms at all. But through her closed eyelids, so to speak, there filtered the fact that Elizabeth altogether avoided looking at Edward, but that he observed her with furtive, eager glances, that somehow seemed disappointed in what they sought. Also, though Elizabeth took spasmodic and violent spells at the piano, she never played in the evening when Edward was there, but had evinced a sudden desire to learn the new patience which Mrs. Hancock had found in a ladies' paper. Mrs. Hancock did not so much wonder at that, for this particular mode of killing time was undoubtedly of thrilling interest, and she almost thought of buying Elizabeth a little patience-table for her birthday, which occurred in October. She intended in any case to look out the article in question in the catalogue from the stores and see how much it cost. There would be no harm in that, and if it cost more than she felt she could manage, why, there would be no necessity to say anything about it. But then an admirable notion struck her—her own table was getting a little rickety ; it shook when

she put cards down on to it. Also it was rather small for the great four-pack "King of Mexico," which she had fully determined to learn this autumn. So Elizabeth should have her old table, and she would get a new one of size No. 1 (bevelled edges and adjustable top). That it was even more expensive did not trouble her, and she impressively told herself that she would not have dreamed of buying it had it not been that she wanted to give dear Elizabeth a present. In fact, though she bought it apparently for herself it was really Elizabeth for whom this great expense was incurred. And all these rich and refreshing rewards—namely, another month at Heathmoor, instead of the cobras and deserts of India, a tour in Egypt, and the most expensive patience-table at the stores—she would announce to her fortunate niece as they went round by the Old Mill. How all the look of trouble and depression would fade from dear Elizabeth's face as she listened to the announcement of those delicious joys, one after the other. Mrs. Hancock felt a sudden gush of thankfulness to the kind disposition of Providence that had endowed her with the ample income which she was so eager to spend in securing the happiness of others ; and even while, without self-conscious commonplace, she felt herself blessed in such opportunities and the will to take advantage of them, she could not help feeling how true it was that kindness and thought for others is so laden with gain for oneself. For she herself would have a new patience-table (size No. 1, with bevelled edges), a delightful companion throughout October, after Edith had left her, while Elizabeth's father would pay her expenses in Egypt.

She could not help feeling also how much more Christian and how much more Martinesque it was to stifle, smother, and destroy whatever might be the cause of Elizabeth's trouble by this perfect shower of causes for happiness, rather than inquire into it and thus run the risk of being herself unsettled and made uneasy. But it had certainly required an effort ; she had to put firmly out of her mind not only Elizabeth's possible worries, but also the remembrance of the evening when she had come back from dinner with the Martins, and thought Edward's voice had sounded odd, and seen Edith's fan lying broken on the floor. That had never been explained. Edith had said subsequently that she supposed she must have stepped on it, but it was very odd she should not have noticed it, for the breaking of all those ivory sticks must have made quite a loud snap. Meantime the gong that heralded the arrival of the motor had sounded quite two minutes and Elizabeth had not yet appeared. Mrs. Hancock thought she would just speak to her on the subject of punctuality, and then wipe all impression of blame away by the recital of these prospective benefits. Elizabeth was not downstairs, and it was just possible that she had not heard the gong ; Lind was told to sound it again.

Elizabeth heard it the second time that it boomed, and rose from where she knelt by her bed, by the side of which five minutes ago she had flung herself, following, so it seemed to her, some blind instinctive impulse. That morning there had broken over her a storm of rayless despair. For a couple of days after her final rejection of Edward, when Edith's abso-

lute determination not to give him up voluntarily had been known to her, the apathetic quiet of the step taken, of deliberate renunciation, had been hers. But it had not been, and the poor girl guessed it, the peace that is always eventually not only the reward but the consequence of self-abnegation, but only the exhaustion that follows a prolonged mental effort. Edith's choice, apart from the tremendous significance it had for herself, was incredible and monstrous to her nature. She did not question the fact that Edith loved Edward, but the notion of love not seeking the happiness of the beloved was to her inconceivable. She could not understand it, could not in consequence have the smallest sympathy with it. But this she had to take and did take on trust, and let depend on it her own unalterable decision—that decision that, as far as she could see, took the sun bodily out of her own life. From mere weariness she had found in the dull acquiescence in this an apathy that had for a couple of days anæsthetized her. Against this insensitiveness, knowing that it was valueless, she had made pitiful little struggles, seeking now to establish some kind of sympathy and renewal of intimacy with her cousin, now to rouse herself to feel in music the passion with which it had inspired her. Instead, for the present, she found she had a shrinking abhorrence of it. Its beauty had become remote, and from its withdrawn eminence, its unassailable snow-peaks, it mocked her. It did more than mock ; it reminded her of all it had done for her, how through it she and Edward had been brought together, to stand now close to each other, embracing, overlapping, yet with a thin, unmeltable ice between them.

Then in due course had come the recuperation of her vital forces, and she had awoke this morning after long and dreamless sleep to find that the anæsthesia of her mind had passed off. For a couple of minutes perhaps she had lain still in the delicious consciousness of restored vigour, and of delight in the new freshness of the early day. Then as she became fully conscious of herself again, she found that what had been recuperated in her was but her capacity for suffering, and the blackness of a vivid despair, bright black, not dull black, fell on her, more black because she knew that it was a darkness of her own making. A word from her to Edward would scatter it and let loose the morning. She had no doubt of that, no doubt that he, at her bidding, would break the fetters of his promise that bound him as easily as if they had been but a wisp of unwoven straw. She told herself and, what was the more persuasive, she could hear his voice telling her that she was committing a crime against love, that she was refusing and bidding him profane the most sacred gift of all. She told herself that she was a fool to listen to any voice but that which sounded so insistently, but there was yet a voice, still and small, that was steadfast in its message to her. It was not that she cared one jot for the ordinary external consequences of a disobedience to that; she guessed that there would be a consensus of opinion in her favour if she disobeyed. No doubt they would say it was a deplorable accident that she and Edward had fallen in love with each other, but once the accident had happened it was best to make the best of a regrettable situation. The

young man had never been in love with poor Edith ; he had but fallen a lukewarm victim to the influence of propinquity and Mrs. Hancock. Certainly it was very sad for Miss Hancock, but she was young, she would get over it, and probably end by making quite a good marriage.

Elizabeth cared little for either the approval or condemnation of the world in general. The thought of it was remote and stifled and insignificant. But it was Edward who called to her, called loud, called closely and low, and she must be deaf not to listen to him, not hear him even. At whatever cost she had to approve of herself.

Black, empty aching, an intolerable loneliness. She had but one desire, apart from the desire of her heart, and that was to escape from it all, to go away as quickly as possible, to be out of sight of what she might not contemplate. Far away, across leagues of hot ocean and miles of plain baking from the summer solstice, was her father. No one else in the world did she want to see, to no one else—if even to him—could she pour out her woe. He would comprehend, would approve, she knew, of all she had done, not blaming her for letting love so completely envelop her, not praising her rejection of it, but simply seeing even as she had seen, in loneliness and heart's anguish, that there was no other course possible. She knew that as thoroughly as if she had already opened her whole heart to him.

There was a letter already written which she had not yet posted ; now she opened it and added a postscript : " Father dear," she wrote, " I am awfully—awfully unhappy, and can't write to you

about it. But when you get this, please send me a telegram saying you want me home at once. Trust me that this is wiser. Don't delay, dear daddy."

The pen dropped from her fingers after she had re-directed her letter, and she sat quite still looking blankly at it. She had told Edith she did not love Edward, that she had never thought of him like that. If there could be degrees in this abject wretchedness, hers was a depth unplumbable. Yet this colossal lie seemed to her necessary. Edith, believing that her cousin loved Edward, yet refused to release him of her own will. So she was to have him, she must be given what was already hers, handsomely, largely. It would be wicked, even at the cost of this denial, to give him her with a stab, so to speak.

Emptiness, utter loneliness self-ordained. She must tell somebody about her misery ; she must pour out her unshared grief, for the burden of it was intolerable. With dry blind eyes, with the groping instinct to seek, just to seek, she threw herself on her knees by her bed. She knew not what or whom she sought ; there was just this blind unerring instinct in her soul, the instinct of the homing pigeon.

Mrs. Hancock put up her parasol when the three cushions were perfectly adjusted, and the car slid slowly forward.

" I think we shall have time to go round by the Old Mill," she said, " though we are a little late in starting. I wonder, Elizabeth, if you could make an effort to be more punctual, dear. I don't think there is a person in the world who hates

blaming people as much as I do, so I don't want or mean to blame you. I only ask you to make a little effort. It is so easy to form a habit, and while you are about it you might just as well form the habit of punctuality as of unpunctuality."

"I am so sorry, Aunt Julia," said she. "I—I wasn't thinking about the time."

"No, dear, that is just it. I want you to think about the time a little more. There is just a little touch of selfishness and inconsiderateness in keeping other people waiting, and selfishness is so horrible, is it not? Edith is never unpunctual, though all the time her ankle was bad she got downstairs very slowly. But she allowed for that. What was the engrossing employment to-day that kept you?"

"I was saying my prayers, Aunt Julia. At least, I was trying to."

Mrs. Hancock laid her hand on Elizabeth's.

"My dear, that is a very good reason," she said, "though I am afraid it means that you forgot to say them when you got up. It's a very good plan, Elizabeth, to say them the moment you get out of bed. Then they are off your mind. Oh, what a beautiful fresh air there is this morning! I think we might almost have my window half down, and yours quite down. Your prayers, yes. And to think that when you came you didn't want to go to church at all. But I felt sure that Mr. Martin—why, there he is, do you see, in a red coat, playing golf? Fancy, what a coincidence! He is dining with us to-night, and I must be sure to tell him that we saw him just the very moment that I was speaking of him. But the only way to get through the day's work is to do

everything punctually, prayers and all. Then when bedtime comes you are ready for it, with nothing left undone to keep you awake. And now, my dear, I have a great deal to tell you, and I'm sure I look forward to doing so. It is almost as great a pleasure to me as it will be to you to hear about all the plans I have made for you."

Mrs. Hancock had settled that her climax was to be Egypt. The patience-table perhaps was the least sensational of the benefits, and she was going to begin with that.

"I have often noticed lately, dear," she said, "what an interest you take in my patience, so much so indeed, Elizabeth, that we've had not a note of music in the evening for a week past, though I've thought sometimes that I have seen Edward looking at the piano as if he would like to hear how you are getting on. Look, there is the Old Mill. Will you tell Denton to stop, so that we can enjoy looking at it? So I thought to myself the other night, or perhaps a little bird whispered it to me, that you would like to play patience, too, in the evening. And so you shall, dear. You shall have my patience-table all for your very own, and I will get another one for myself. Mind, Elizabeth, it is not lent you to use only as you use the other things in the house, but it is quite yours, the moment my other table comes from the stores. You may take it back to India if you wish, when you go. *When* you go."

"Oh, that is kind, dear Aunt Julia," said the girl. "But why should you give it me, and go to the expense of a new one? I enjoy seeing you play just as much as I should enjoy playing myself."

Mrs. Hancock wondered if this was really true.

Her generosity about taking the table to India, which so neatly introduced the next topic, had been an unpremeditated flash. Of course, if Elizabeth did not want to play patience, there was no kind of reason for getting a new table. But luckily at this moment she remembered "King of Mexico," which, employing four packs, could not be properly laid out on the table she at present used.

"My dear, I am determined you shall have a table of your own," she said, "to take to India with you if you wish. And perhaps you noticed that I said 'when you go,' and repeated it. That brings me on to my second plan. I should enjoy, dear, I should really enjoy your stopping on here after Edith and Edward are married; then you will no longer share the little treats, like having a drive in my motor, with Edith, but you can come out in it whenever I go, twice a day if you like. And if you like, you shall have Edith's room, and I shall make Mrs. Williams and Lind and all of them quite understand that you are to take Edith's place. You shan't be a visitor any more. Arundel shall be your English home."

"Oh, Aunt Julia—— !" began Elizabeth.

"No; wait a minute. You shall have all my plans together. Here you will be all October, with your own patience-table, and Edith's room, until I go to Egypt in November. And then, and then, my dear, you shall come with me. I have written to your father, and we have quite arranged it. You will be absolutely one of our party, and when Edith and Edward join us, as they will do at Cairo—oh, look at those starlings, what a quantity !—when they join us at Cairo we

will all go up the Nile together and see everything there is to be seen. How busy we shall be, you and I, all October, my dear, reading all sorts of learned books ; I am sure you will read aloud very well with a little practice. We shall be quite a pair of blue-stockings when we meet Edith and Edward again, and be able to tell them all sorts of interesting things about the Greeks and ancient Egyptians. We will take your patience-table with us, for it shuts up more conveniently than any table I have ever seen, and I dare say I shall often ask you for the loan of it, if you will be so kind as to lend it me. And then we shall all come down the Nile together, such a happy party, and I know very well, dear Elizabeth, that when we come to part, and you go on to India from wherever it is that the boats call, I for one shall miss you very much indeed."

Mrs. Hancock had warmed herself up into the most pleasurable glow of generosity, and felt that all these wonderful plans, which, as a matter of fact, had been made solely with a view to her own comfort, were entirely due to her altruistic desire for Elizabeth's delight. Her self-deception was complete and triumphant; she had for the time quite lost sight of the undoubted fact that she had thought of herself and herself only in the making of them. She had secured an excuse for a new patience-table, a companion during what would have otherwise been a month of loneliness, and, at no expense to herself, of somebody who would look after her in Egypt and be devoted to her comfort. She fully expected a burst of gratitude, a rapturous and scarcely credulous assent from the girl.

Elizabeth sat quite silent for a moment.

"Oh, Aunt Julia, it is sweet of you," she said, "but I think it is all quite impossible. I must go back to India; I must get back to father."

Aunt Julia still glowed.

"My dear, your father has made up his mind to do without you and let you enjoy yourself," she said. "I wrote to him about it, oh, weeks ago, telling him not to allude to it at all to you, but that I would tell you. He will rejoice in your happiness as much as I."

Elizabeth clasped her hands together on her knee.

"Oh, I can't, I can't!" she said. "But thank you ever so much, Aunt Julia. Indeed, I wrote to father only to-day, saying that I wanted to come back to him quite soon, sooner than I had planned. I can't explain. You have been so kind to me, I know, but I must go back to India as soon as possible. Simply that."

Mrs. Hancock recognized the earnestness of the girl's tone, and all the pleasure and glow faded from her face.

"Really, I think your words do require some explanation," she said. "To think of me so busy planning and contriving for your pleasure, and you saying that you don't want any of my plans! Yes, Denton, drive on. We have looked at the Old Mill long enough. I think you ought to tell me what it all means, Elizabeth."

"I can't tell you," said she. "Try to think it means nothing, or that it means only just what I have said. It does mean that. I want to go back to India. If it was possible I would go back to-day. I want to see father. I have been

a long time away from him, and though you and—and Edith and Edward are so kind I miss him dreadfully. I am homesick; I want to get back."

Mrs. Hancock's own beautiful architectural designs for Elizabeth's happiness tumbled in ruins, and Elizabeth's notions of replacing them did not seem in the least satisfactory. She who avowedly had "planned and contrived" for this end found herself accusing the girl of the most barefaced selfishness when she stated what she really wanted. Apparently she thought about nothing but herself.

"Well, all I can say at present," said Mrs. Hancock, "is that I am dreadfully disappointed and grieved."

"Yes, I am sorry," put in Elizabeth, "but—but it is quite impossible. You mustn't think I am ungrateful, Aunt Julia."

"I do not think you can expect me to praise you for your gratitude," said Mrs. Hancock.

"No. I don't want praise; I don't deserve it. But I want to go back to father."

Mrs. Hancock's sense of ill-usage, of having her kindness met by black ingratitude, rankled and grew. This was worse, much worse, than the painful case of the housemaid, who suited her so well, going away from her service to be married. Indeed, that misguided creature—the marriage did not turn out very happily, and Mrs. Hancock was sure she didn't wonder—the cause of so many bitter memories, appeared now as a perfect angel in comparison.

"I must say that I cannot consider this a pretty return for all the indulgences I have showered on you," she said. "I have treated you like my own daughter, Elizabeth, with the piano always

ready dusted for you, and the most expensive motor always whirling you about the country, wherever you like to go, and the new table for your patience, and never a thing asked of you in return till I suggest that you should keep me company during October, and this you flatly refuse. And what your father will say I don't know, with all his kindness in paying for your tour in Egypt, when we settled between us to let you come with me all up the Nile, at a great deal of expense. And now all you can say is that you don't want to go, and can't explain why. And here was I thinking of ordering books on Egypt from the London library this very afternoon, and even planning going up to London some day this week to make sure of getting places in the sleeping-car to Marseilles. And you can't explain ! "

Elizabeth felt suddenly goaded to exasperation at this child's babble of books from the library and tickets for the sleeping-car. It was round such things as these that her aunt's emotions clung like swarming bees around their queen. She felt a wild desire to supply Aunt Julia with something real to think about, something that would really pierce through those coils of comfort-padding that wrapped her up as in eiderdown quilts. At present all that ever reached her was a slight disarrangement, a minute tweaking of one of her quilts. Or if by years of habit they were too firmly tucked round her, it would be something to let her see that others were not so grossly wadded against the world, against reality.

" I will explain if you like," she said quickly, and almost smiled to see Aunt Julia huddling her quilts round her, clutching them with eager fingers,

dreading lest they should be taken from her by cruel and inconsiderate hands.

"My dear, you haven't given me your confidence voluntarily," she said in a great hurry, "and I am the last person in the world to ask for confidence when it is not freely given. Dear Edith has always told me everything, but that is no reason why you should—— "

"Do you mean that Edith has told you about *this*? " asked the girl.

"About your inexplicable rejection of all my plans for you, including the patience-table? No, certainly not. That, I imagine, concerns you. My dear Edith would be the last to betray what seems to be a secret—— "

Elizabeth broke in again.

"But I am offering not to make a secret of it from you," she said.

Mrs. Hancock turned an almost imploring face to her.

"No, Elizabeth," she said. "You have not come to me with it of your own accord, and I was quite wrong to hint that you owed me an explanation. If I have hinted so I withdraw it. Look, there is Mr. Beaumont with his butterfly-net. Let us be silent for a little and collect ourselves again ; our talk was getting very wild and uncomfortable. Would you kindly put your window a shade more up? "

Mrs. Hancock regarded the view with a severe and compressed face, into which there stole by degrees an expression of relief. She felt that she had dealt with this threatening situation in an extremely tactful manner. Elizabeth had not chosen to confide in her, and she had put, so she

told herself, all, all her natural curiosity aside and refused to hear the secret which had not voluntarily been made known to her. That waiving of her personal feelings in the matter had, as usual, its immediate rewards, for she had averted the risk of hearing something thoroughly uncomfortable. She dismissed that consideration, and in the silence for which she had asked devoted herself to the pained contemplation of Elizabeth's selfishness, which had so much surprised and grieved her. Hitherto she had not thought Elizabeth at all selfish, except in the matter of unpunctuality, and the discovery was a great blow to her. She had quite made up her mind that the girl would jump at those delightful proposals, which had been the fruit of so much thought. About Egypt she did not care so particularly, but she felt terribly blank at the prospect of a lonely October. With Elizabeth taking a real solid interest in patience, with the interval between tea and dinner filled in by readings about the ancient Egyptians, and with a companion for the two daily motor drives, she had felt really quite resigned to losing Edith, since on their return from Egypt she would be living again next door, and of course would be only too delighted to enjoy her mother's companionship during Edward's daily absence in the City. And now there had come this earthquake, upsetting everything. There was a proverb that misfortunes never come singly, and she felt an indefinable dread that Filson would want to marry next, or Mrs. Williams threaten to leave her. Of course, she could raise Mrs. Williams's wages again to stem this tide of disaster, but if Filson wanted to marry—— No doubt she could try the effect of

raising Filson's wages, and could point to the awful fate of the housemaid, but even that might not prove sufficient if Filson loved some hypothetical young man very much. Then she tried to cling to the gospel of Mr. Martin, and determined not to dwell on these unnerving possibilities.

Meantime, Elizabeth sat silent (as requested) by her, and the kindliness of Mrs. Hancock, which existed in large crude quantities, and her affection for the girl, which in its own way was perfectly genuine, came to her aid. However startling and deplorable Elizabeth's selfishness was, she was sorry for whatever might be the trouble that lay at the root of it, and, provided only that trouble was not confided to her, was willing and eager to do her best to alleviate it. Secretly she guessed that Edward was concerned in it; she guessed also that the girl's affections were concerned in it. She rejected without difficulty that Elizabeth had conceived a hopeless passion for Mr. Beaumont, or an illicit one for Mr. Martin, and she inferred that Elizabeth's affections and Edward were synonymous terms. But that was only a guess—she hastened to assure herself of that—and might really be as insubstantial as she hoped was the shattering notion that Filson was engaged in a love affair, and she shut the door on it. There was poor Elizabeth's trouble safely locked up, and she wondered how she could help her. She turned to the girl.

"My dear, I am sure you have some trouble," she said, "and, though I would be the last to ask you about it, is there not anybody you could consult? Perhaps your wanting to go back to your

father means that you think he could help you. But is there no one here? Could you not tell Edith, if she does not know about it already? Or there is Mr. Martin. You would find him all kindness and wisdom. I often think of him as my mind-doctor, to whom I would certainly go myself if I was worried."

"Oh, thank you, Aunt Julia," said she. "But I don't think I will worry Mr. Martin. I should like to tell daddy about it, and I shall."

"But it would be no worry for Mr. Martin," said Mrs. Hancock. "He is so used to hearing about other people's troubles. It is quite his profession. He has often said to me that his wish is to bring joy to people and take away their wretchedness. Such a noble career! I can't think why they don't make him a bishop."

Elizabeth gave a little squeal of laughter, as unexpected to herself as it was to her aunt.

"I don't think I will, really, Aunt Julia," she repeated.

This appeared to Mrs. Hancock another bit of selfishness. It seemed to her quite likely that Mr. Martin's really magical touch might easily remove Elizabeth's trouble, in which case Egypt and the patience-table blossomed again instead of withering on their stalks. But she determined not to give it all up quite yet and abandon Elizabeth, so it represented itself to her, to the moral pit of her selfishness.

Mr. Martin, who dined with Mrs. Hancock that evening, and spoke of Egypt as if it was a newly acquired possession of hers, like her motor or the gate that had, in spite of Edward's lukewarmness on the subject, been put into the wall

that separated the two gardens, trumpeted her praise in his usual manner.

"We shall miss you terribly," he said. "Heathmoor will not be itself without you. But still how right you are to go and see it all for yourself. You take your car with you? No? Then I shall be down on Denton and expect him to stop for my sermon every Sunday morning, poor fellow! instead of stealing out to bring your car back for you. Poor Denton! Ha, ha! He'll be glad, I'll warrant, when you come back again and he can shirk the padre's jaw as usual. An excellent fellow, Denton! Upon my word, I am sorry for him. I shall skip a page or two every now and then if Denton looks too reproachfully at me."

"Alfred, Alfred!" said his wife.

"I shall nobble—isn't it nobble, Edward?—I shall nobble Denton to sing psalms in the choir," said Mr. Martin, "while Mrs. Hancock is away. He will have no car to take back after she has gone to church. Yes, yes; give Denton a dose of David to begin with, and Alfred to finish up with!" Mr. Martin looked furtively round to see if Lind was amused, and Mrs. Martin put her hand to her face.

"Alfred, Alfred!" she said. "Is not Alfred naughty!"

Mrs. Hancock beamed delightedly. This wild religious badinage always pleased her. It seemed to make a human thing of religion, to bring it into ordinary life.

"I will leave Denton in your hands," she said, "with the utmost confidence."

"So long as we don't make a clergyman of him

before you come back," suggested Mr. Martin. "We won't do that; there are many mansions, and I'm sure that a good fellow in his garage occupies one of them. We all have got our mansion, have we not? You, Miss Elizabeth, in your music, Edward here in the City, though he's a lucky fellow to be sure, for he has a musical mansion as well. And we all meet; we all meet."

This was a shade more solemn than Mr. Martin's usual dinner-table conversation, and Mrs. Hancock, crumbling her bread with dropped eyes, saw here a very good gambit to open with again in a little serious conversation she meant, if possible, to have with him afterwards. Then the appearance of a very particular salad roused her immediate attention.

"This you must eat, Mr. Martin," she said; "it is the new sort of lettuce which Ellis insisted on my getting. I am told that in Egypt it is quite unsafe to eat salad or any raw vegetable, for you can't tell who has been touching it, or what sort of water it has been washed in. It's the same in India, is it not, Elizabeth?"

Mr. Martin turned briskly to the girl.

"And why don't you join your aunt in her tour to Egypt?" he said. "It's all on the way back to India, is it not? Why not put Afric's sunny fountains in before India's coral strands? Dear me, how wonderful Bishop Heber's grasp is!"

This was indeed another coincidence, that Mr. Martin should suggest, quite without consultation, the very scheme that Mrs. Hancock had "planned and contrived." That Mr. Martin should think

of it quite independently, seemed to Mrs. Hancock a tremendous, almost a religious, argument in its favour.

"Well, that is odd now that you should have mentioned that," she said, "for I was proposing to Elizabeth only this morning that she should do that very thing. And that Mr. Martin should agree with me! Well!"

Edward looked up, caught Elizabeth's eye, ricocheted, so to speak, on to Edith's, and returned in time to catch the drift of Mr. Martin's further comment on Bishop Heber. Mrs. Hancock saw the sudden colour flame in Elizabeth's face, saw the glance that played between her three young people, and shut more firmly than ever the door into which she had thrust her conjecture on this subject. She entirely refused to recognize the possible existence of anything so very uncomfortable. Mr. Martin observed that his wife had got well under way again with Bishop Heber, and spoke confidently to his hostess.

"I've got schemes in my head, too, about Egypt," he said, "though I don't know that they will come to anything. I want to send my dear Minnie to the South for a month or two of the winter. You remember, perhaps, how unwell she was last winter, and what wonderful jellies Mrs. Williams sent her. Indeed, if I think I can manage it, I believe I shall really have the courage to suggest that she goes out about the same time as you, so that she won't be quite alone in the land of bondage. Of course, I don't for the moment hint at her actually joining your party. But hush, Mrs. Hancock, we are observed! I have not said a word about it to her yet."

It was impossible that Mrs. Hancock should not feel that Providence had kindly turned his attention to her disappointment about Elizabeth and the Egyptian tour. It was true that the even more harrowing subject of her lonely October—in case Elizabeth persisted in her selfishness—had not at present attracted his notice, but this suggestion of Mr. Martin's seemed to her to be a direct and Divine contrivance for her comfort. She had no wish to examine into the logic of her belief ; she did not dream of inquiring if she really thought that Mrs. Martin had suffered from bronchitis last winter in order that her husband might think of sending her South now, so that Mrs. Hancock should have somebody to attend to her in Egypt, but she felt that Elizabeth perhaps was not intended to go to Egypt, which being so, Providence, having a special regard for her comfort, had put forward this utterly unexpected idea to see if she liked it. She did like it. She also formed the conclusion that she on her side was meant not to urge Elizabeth any more, nor even to see if Mr. Martin could not probe and heal her trouble. It was evident that her entire arrangements were being seen after for her. But she had to meet this half-way, to acquiesce thankfully, and help it on. She turned beamingly to Mr. Martin.

" The very thing ! " she said. " And as for dear Mrs. Martin not being of our party, how could you suggest such an idea? "

Some subject cognate to Bishop Heber was actively engaging Mrs. Martin, and Mrs. Hancock could speak without fear of being overheard.

" She shall share my sitting-room, as my guest, of course, and everything," she said. " And after

dinner you and I must have a couple of words together, if it is only the question of expense that troubles you. If there is any difficulty there you must allow me to help. And Elizabeth says, for the matter of that, that the second-class cabins on the liners to Port Said are every bit as good as the first."

This offer to help was not so precipitate as it sounded. Mrs. Hancock had seriously considered during the afternoon what the expense of a companion would be, and had come to the conclusion that if Elizabeth would not join her, she would be able to afford it. But this providential idea would save her the greater part of that expense, for no doubt, if she could persuade Mr. Martin to let her pay (since she would then be saved the full expenses of a companion) some forty pounds or perhaps thirty towards Mrs. Martin's travelling, his doubts on the subject of whether it could be afforded would be completely removed. She would tell him that she looked on it as a form of charity, which he must not be too proud to accept. She was subscribing to Mrs. Martin's efficiency in parochial work, which was a clear duty. Mrs. Martin must be induced to see it in the same light, and she surely would, when she saw that her husband and Mrs. Hancock were so completely in accord on the subject. And if—if behind that locked door in her mind there was shut up the true reason for Elizabeth's unwillingness to go to Egypt, how wonderfully it had been conveyed to her that she must not urge her any more. That, of course, was the most important thing of all. She must also cease from accusing Elizabeth in her mind of any selfishness. She must dismiss

it all now, not even wonder whether it was true or not. Providence had locked the door on it, and indicated, quite unmistakably, that Elizabeth was not to go to Egypt. Providence, too, had caused her pass-book to be returned to her disclosing a very sound position ; even forty pounds would not worry her at all. But that was no reason why she should not see whether thirty would not put Mr. Martin's mind at ease on the question of expense. She would certainly ask Elizabeth to play to them after dinner, and go out into the garden with Mr. Martin to enjoy the music from there.

Mr. Martin, left alone with Edward after dinner, had another glass of port before he took his cigarette on general principles of *bonhomie* and partaking in the pleasure of other people, and also on the particular principle that Mrs. Hancock's port was a very charming beverage. He continued also to trumpet her praises in a confidential manner.

" The most generous woman I know ! " he said. " You are indeed lucky to be allying yourself with her daughter. An instance occurred at dinner. I mentioned that I was thinking of sending my wife South for the winter—not a word of this yet to anybody, my dear fellow—and she guessed that expense might be a serious consideration to me. I had but ever so faintly alluded to it. Instantly she offered to help, suggesting that my wife should be of her party. You join them, I think, you and your bride, at Cairo, do you not? "

" That is the idea."

" A very good one. And Miss Elizabeth, is she

going too? It seemed to have occurred to her aunt."

Edward got up.

"I know she thought of it," he said, "but—but I do not suppose Elizabeth will go. Shall we join the others? I get scolded if we stop in the dining-room too long."

"Certainly, certainly, if you will allow me one more whiff of this excellent cigarette. Mrs. Hancock always gives her guests of the very best. And how much more, my dear fellow, has she given you her best of all."

Edward did not reply to this, but waited in silence while Mr. Martin took his one whiff. As they crossed the hall the front-door bell sounded and Lind took in a telegram.

"Miss Elizabeth, sir," he said to Edward.

Edward just glanced at it; it was a foreign telegram.

"I'll take it in," he said.

Mrs. Hancock had stationed herself strategically near the window, so that she could easily stroll out with Mr. Martin.

"There you are," she said; "and you've both been good and not waited too long. Now let us have some music. There's room for you here, Mr. Martin. Who will begin—you, Edward, or Elizabeth? I meant to have got some duets for you, and then you could have played together. What is that, Edward?"

"A telegram for Elizabeth," he said.

"Open it then, dear," said Mrs. Hancock to the girl. "We'll excuse you."

The little hush that so often attends the opening of a telegram fell on the room as Elizabeth tore

open the thin paper. She looked at the message, and, standing quite still, handed it to her aunt. It was from her stepmother, and told her that her father had died of cholera that morning.

BOOK III

CHAPTER XII

APRIL EVENING

ELIZABETH was sitting in the drawing-room window of the little house that her mother and she had taken in Oakley Street on a warm, uncertain afternoon of April in the following year. The window was wide open and the breeze that blew in from the south-west ruffled the leaves of the music that stood open on the piano. It seemed to the girl's indolent mood that there was quite a good chance of their not blowing on to the floor, and since that was so, she much preferred going to pick them up if this happened rather than disturb herself for fear of its happening. Outside there was a small brick-walled enclosure, with strips of flower-bed, bright, nodding with daffodils, and a fig-tree, rather sooty in foliage, and hopelessly incapable of bearing any fruit at all, was thrusting out broad handlike leaves from its angled boughs. This enclosure Mrs. Fanshawe was accustomed to call "that dreadful little backyard" when she felt like that, but in more cheerful moods alluded to it as "that dear little garden." For some days past it had been a dreadful little backyard.

Colonel Fanshawe had left his widow and

daughter in circumstances that admitted of comfort and demanded care, and Mrs. Fanshawe sometimes complained of, sometimes rather enjoyed the practice of economy. Elizabeth was rather afraid of those bouts of economical enjoyment, for they meant that Mrs. Fanshawe was apt to order more coal than the cellar would possibly hold, as she got a cheaper quotation for large quantities, or would take a taxicab to some far-distant shop in Oxford Street, keep it waiting an hour and drive back in it bursting with innumerable packages. She would then gleefully reckon up the saving she had effected by not buying the same goods at the shop just round the corner ; sometimes it amounted to as much as two shillings, in which case she would give Elizabeth quite a little homily on the virtue of thrift and the immense importance of looking after the pence. The shillings apparently as represented by the taxi were capable of looking after themselves. After this thrifty afternoon she would feel that a little treat was owing to them, and she would take Elizabeth to a concert. At other times, still enjoying it, she would help in the housework, and, putting on a very pretty grey apron, dust the china on the chimney-piece in the drawing-room, or even clean the handle of the front door with some sample that had been sent her which was of unrivalled merit in polishing brasswork. She still required a great deal of rest to recuperate her from labours past, and fit her for those to come, and always had breakfast in bed. Apart from this necessary repose and the fatigue engendered by the practice of economies, her time for the last two months had been largely taken up in

collecting materials for a "Short Memoir" of her late husband.

"I feel that I who know him best," she said to Elizabeth, "owe it to his large circle of friends at home and abroad, who loved him, to tell them what I can about him. It is my duty, dear. In addition to that, his public service as a soldier was never properly appreciated by the War Office, and it is right that they should know what they have lost, now that it is too late."

Elizabeth felt as if a file had been drawn across her front teeth, and her stepmother went on with a certain degree of complacency, with a sense of importance, and yet not without sincerity.

"It is so beautiful, that passage in 'In Memoriam,'" she said, wiping her eyes, "where Tennyson says that to write about Mr. Hallam is a 'sad narcotic, numbing pain.' I know he would have understood my feeling about it, which is just that. I shall, of course, state in the preface my reasons for writing the memoir, and say that, though it is like tearing open a wound that will never heal, I owe it to my dear husband's memory."

She paused a moment.

"It will be privately printed, of course," she said, "and I shall give it to all his friends. I was thinking of having a purple cloth binding with gilt lettering."

"Won't it be very expensive, mamma?" asked the girl.

"I cannot bring myself to think about the expense. You and I will have to be very economical, I know; but when a call of duty comes like this, I feel that no other consideration

can stand in my way. If you think it quietly over, Elizabeth," she said, again crying a little, "I believe you will agree with me, when you recollect all that your dear father was. It will help—I hope it will help—you to appreciate him, too, as well as the War Office."

This awful little conversation, which held for Elizabeth a certain miserable wounding humour, had taken place soon after Mrs. Fanshawe had come back to England after her husband's death. She had returned as soon as she had settled her affairs in India, and had sold, not unsuccessfully, the bungalow and all it contained, retaining only a few personal possessions of his and what belonged to Elizabeth and herself. This private property included many packets of his letters, which she tied up in a black ribbon and bestowed in an immense tin dispatch-box, with "Corrospondence" (the orthography of which was not worth correcting) printed in white letters on it. This, indeed, had suggested to her the idea of the "Short Memoir," and with it by the side of her chair or sofa she made masses of extracts, with a view to arranging them afterwards in the chapters on his second marriage and his home-life. The pieces which she selected for publication almost entirely consisted of affectionate words to herself, and she mostly omitted messages he sent to Elizabeth, or, indeed, anything that did not directly refer to his affection for his wife. Mrs. Hancock had been put under contribution to supply details about his boyhood and early manhood, which similarly consisted for the most part in stories to show how fond he was of her. These for a month had poured in in immense quantities, and

before they came to an end Mrs. Fanshawe had begun to find them exceedingly tedious. Dry details, in the same way, about his military service, did not so much engage Mrs. Fanshawe's attention, and it was Elizabeth's duty to get the facts about those from Army Lists, while she, during the long winter evenings, searched through his letters for fresh instances of his devotion to her, and wrote and had typewritten the preface, which was on the lines already indicated. The chapter on "Social Life in India" was already arranged also, in a rambling sort of fashion, and showed without the slightest doubt how popular Mrs. Fanshawe was at dinner-parties and balls, and how her husband, with the wonderful confidence and trust he had in her, was never the slightest bit jealous. His first wife, Elizabeth's mother, was scarcely to be mentioned in the "Short Memoir." She might have been a week-end visitor who had not made much impression on him. . . .

The wind, which had been threatening so long to spill the music that stood open on the piano, carried out its intention at last, but still Elizabeth did not stir. Something of the languor of spring had invaded her, and meaning every moment to get up and go on with her practising, which had been the excuse for her not going out with her mother on an expedition of economy to the Army and Navy Stores, she still lounged in the window-seat thinking over all that had passed since that evening when Edward came into the drawing-room at Arundel with the foreign telegram in his hand. It had been a shock to her, the violence of which she had not been conscious of at the

time, but which showed itself afterwards in the weeks of nerve fatigue that followed. There had been taken away something in the very core and kernel of her life, and for the time she had known less of grief than of an inexplicable lack, as if, on the physical plane, a limb had been amputated, and that she had just awoke from the operation and found herself with arm or leg no longer there. Indeed, the feeling was not so much that he was dead as that a piece of herself was gone. She sent out messages from her brain and they were not received anywhere, nothing thrilled or moved in correspondence with them.

And then slowly and by degrees there began to wake in her that new sense that almost always wakens in those who have suffered some intimate bereavement. Her mind could not take in, could not conceive, when once faced with it, the notion of annihilation, of ceasing to be. It revolted from it, and though for a time her reason (as she accounted her reason) kept telling her that he was gone, that the days of their love and confidence were over, she found the conclusion growing incredible. It began to dawn in her, like the waking of a new intelligence, that there was nothing of him gone, except the sight of him, and the possibility of his presence being apprehended any more by her physical senses. She knew she would not again see or touch him as she had known him before, or again hear his voice, but she found herself daily realizing more and more distinctly, by some perception as innate in her as growth, the knowledge that he was not and could not have been taken away, amputated, destroyed. All of him that she missed so dread-

fully, all that for which she stretched out empty arms in the dark, was not her essential father, but only the signs by which she knew him. He became her companion again, by no effort of the imagination, but by the assertion of an instinct that could not be contradicted. Never in those communings with his quiet wisdom beneath the fading crimson of the Indian sunsets had she felt more strongly than now the immortal kinship between them, the reality of their spiritual alliance. He had told her once in words that at the time seemed to her to have been spoken in an unknown tongue that it was impossible to go beyond love, that you can only penetrate into it, finding it without beginning and without end. It was by his death that she had begun to understand that, by the knowledge of the impotence of the supreme divider—— The supreme divider ! She echoed the meaningless words, the words from which all meaning had departed. Death did not divide ; it was only meanness, falseness, impatience that could do so tragic a work.

She remembered with growing clearness, as she lay in the window seat, with the daffodils nodding outside, and the music splayed on the floor, their talk in the garden that evening. It was as if it had been written in her mind with invisible ink, which required some spiritual solution to be poured over it, to bring out the words again. She herself, she remembered, had been full of vague visions as to the possibilities and wonders of the world. She had been full of the dreams that were coloured with the vivid unsubstantial hues that are painted by inexperience. Now behind them, not removing

them or painting over them, there was stealing, soaking into them the colours that at the time seemed to her to be somehow dull, dingy, stereotyped. What he had said to her about love had seemed somehow commonplace, and when an hour or two afterwards she had sat by the dying fakir at the bottom of the garden, it was more the sensationalism, the picturesqueness of that weary and happy passing that had affected her. Now she saw differently—she saw that precisely the same spirit, precisely the same inborn knowledge had inspired both. The same rich and unclouded vision was their daily outlook. They had both staked their all on love. Then a few days afterwards Elizabeth had ridden out with her father, and he had spoken to her in the same quiet way about death. He had said he enjoyed life tremendously, but as for death it was to him but another stage in growing up. . . .

Elizabeth turned her face to the garden and the bright daffodils.

"Daddy! Daddy!" she said aloud.

She raised herself on her elbow, with the indolence and languor of spring quite slipped off from her, overwhelmingly conscious of her nearness to her father, not to his memory, but to him. None knew, none ever would know except herself, and she but guessed at the huge significance of it, just what his death had done for her with regard to her comprehension of life. The news had come to her in days of despair, when love itself seemed manifested to her only in the form of a desperate renunciation, when she who loved and was loved in return, was severed just by an untimely promise,

by a bond signed blindly. Even then she had known, though only by the groping of instinct, that to disown that, or to allow it to be disowned, was to poison the very fountain and well-spring of love. Edward, she knew well, with reason on his side, had longed to marry her in despite of that, believing that the eternal gushing of that spring would wash away from the mouth of it the taint that had been laid there. But now she had begun to see how it was that her instinct had directed her, for even then, when her need was the sorest, she had comprehended, though without conscious knowledge of her comprehension, that while loyalty was of the very essence of love, passion was but a symptom of it ; that while love died at the breath of disloyalty, it existed still, deep and calm, though the symptom, the froth on the surface was blown off it by the austere wind of mere straightforward, commonplace duty, or was suffered to die down under the frozen dawn of renunciation. How she had longed through those thirsty days to be able to go to her father and be comforted by his steadfast upholding of her choice, a draught of cold, sweet water in the sultriness of a barren land. Never, so it had been ordained, should she whisper to him the story of the summer, nor cry her fill on his shoulder, but his upholding and his comforting had been not one whit less vivid and present to her, though far away the parching wind swept over the grave beneath the tamarisk-trees in that remote cemetery.

But it was not often she thought either of the grave or of his death itself, for those things seemed to her even as they had seemed to him, but little incidents of the wayside, not events of great

moment in the onward march of his soul, nor to be given a place beside what he had been and what he was to her. He had died swiftly under the stroke of the sword of the pestilence, died in a few hours from the time that he had been taken ill. They had buried him that night as the moon rose, with the wheeling planets for his funeral lamps, and the flitting owls crying his requiem. It was but little of him and that no more than a garment outworn that had there been laid to rest ; he, his essential self, seemed to Elizabeth never to have left her through all the dark days of autumn and winter, nor through the lengthening evenings of this long-delayed spring.

It had been a hard struggle and a stern one, this work in which his spirit seemed so continually to have been at her side. There was so much which appeared inextricably intertwined with her love for Edward that must be cast out, annihilated ; there was so much also, and this was of even greater moment, that must be so loyally and uncompromisingly kept. Not one of those threads of pure gold that ran through the whole fabric must be drawn out of it ; there must be no loss of that, no turning the royal mantle into a cloak for a funeral. She must not part, if her shoulders on to which it had fallen, were to be worthy of it, with one gleam of its splendour, with one atom of its gold, and here was a task to test the utmost of her patience and her wisdom, in preserving all this, and yet unravelling and disentangling certain other threads. There were feelings, there were attitudes of mind, there were desires connected with Edward that seemed at first to be an integral part of the fabric, so strictly

were they woven into it ; it seemed that to draw these out must make rents. And yet it had to be done, to be done radically and completely, though no rent must be seen or exist there. It was not that these things were in themselves no part of love ; it was only that circumstances had made it impossible that they should be part of her love for him. Indeed, they were not hers ; they belonged by right to Edith. They must come out of her fabric ; each one of them must come out. She had to divert from it certain strains, certain colours, the human longing, the desire, the yearning even. They were natural, they were proper for one other woman only, but not for herself. How well she remembered how her father had told her that knowledge would come to her through love, through love of a "common man," as she had added. It was even so ; it had come to her thus, and even more through the right renunciation, not the mere rejection of the whole, but the rejection of a certain part of it. The gold, all that was infinitely precious, must remain. But the rest was not dross ; merely it was not hers.

Not only at first, but through long months of patient effort, the task appeared impossible, so intimately was the passion of her love woven in with the love itself. Sensibly enough, she let her subconscious mind work at it, while she employed her best efforts in filling the days with other interests and occupations. Yet so many of these, and of them all the one that hitherto had most enthralled and engrossed her, namely, the study of music, gave her every moment stabs of recollection. Her passion for it had been so immensely kindled and quickened by him, that

when she tried to kindle it again, it was still the thought of him that fed the flame. All that had to go ; she must retrace her steps and find for it the inspiration of itself alone. She had to shatter the dreams with which it filled her ; she had to shake herself awake from them. The associations which it roused in her must be disconnected from it ; it had to be made to speak to her with its own voice. Often she thought of giving it up altogether, of cutting off from the stem of her life the flower of melody and harmony, so closely were they set with thorns that made her heart bleed. Yet that again would have been a wanton and a mutilating renunciation. Instead, with patience that sometimes shrank and fainted, she set herself to pick off the thorns that were no essential part of the growth. Yet the thorns bled ; the very stem seemed to ooze with the life-sap.

And of all the spiritual tasks which filled Elizabeth's days with strivings, and drove sleep from her during the weary nights, the most haunting, the most difficult of all remains to be mentioned —namely, that of keeping her heart sweet when she thought of Edith. It seemed at first that mere patience, mere daily and unremitting striving, was of no avail to quarry away that adamantine block ; the tools of her armoury were blunted at its contact. She tried not to judge her, or to attempt to record a verdict about an action that was morally unintelligible to her, if, indeed, she could preserve herself from thinking it vile, but when she contemplated the choice Edith had made, her refusal to let Edward go free from the promise he had made, before he knew what love was, she could scarcely abstain from revolted condem-

nation, or succeed in leaving the case unjudged. It was not easy to dissociate from it the momentous personal consequences that this refusal held for her, or to look at it impartially, as if the situation had been presented to her as an incident that had happened among strangers ; but even when she most schooled herself to put her own entanglement in it out of the question she felt it difficult not to seethe with scorn over it. She could not understand how a girl with respect either for herself or the great emotions could refuse to set free a man who no longer wished to be tied to her, who longed, as Edith knew very well, to be acquitted of his promise. It was inconceivable, even had he not given his heart elsewhere, to claim a right in such a matter, to refuse to uncage the bird of love which was beating its wings against the wires, just because the cage was hers, and in her hands it was to close or unclose the door. It seemed to Elizabeth that the very fact that Edith loved him, though it made it more difficult for her to give him up, must make that giving of him up the more imperative. Love, so it appeared to her, must have relaxed the fingers that detained him. Had she not cared for him, had she not known what love was, these other desires, the liking she had for him, the desire in a general way to be married, the feeling that she would be happy with him, might have caused her to keep him, or, at any rate, not voluntarily to release him from his promise. But that she could love (as Elizabeth rightly felt she did) and yet not find predominant over everything else the longing for his happiness was the thing that was utterly inconceivable.

Whether Edith had secured her own happiness she had no idea whatever. She had but seen her some half-dozen times since Edward and Edith had returned from Egypt in the early spring, and Edith seemed to have developed a sort of sheath over her, a carapace that was insensitive to the touch. It was natural—indeed, anything else would have been impossible—that no mention of past history or how it bore on the present should take place between them, but it seemed to Elizabeth that her cousin had shut herself up in this hard integument, and gave no indication of her real self. If she spoke of her home, it was to say that they had put a fresh carpet down in the drawing-room, if of her daily life, to say that she often lunched with her mother ; if of Mrs. Hancock, that she had raised Denton's wages ; if of Edward, that he seldom came back from the City before the later of the two trains. Once or twice, it is true, it had seemed to Elizabeth as if Edith was wanting to say something more, that, as if shipwrecked on some desert island, she was silently waving an inconspicuous flag, that might, indeed, not be a flag at all. But nothing came of these efforts, and it was impossible for Elizabeth to urge her to confidence, when it was so very doubtful whether she wished to confide, or, indeed, had anything to say. Once Elizabeth had made an impulsive attempt—had said suddenly, not pausing to consider the wisdom of such a speech, but eager for her own sincerity—

"Oh, Edith, I hope you are happy. You are, aren't you?" And Edith, if she had been signalling, furled her flag at once, as if afraid it had been seen.

"Quite happy, thank you," she had said, and picked up from the floor the umbrella with a false onyx top that had fallen there. She proceeded to explain about the top. Mrs. Hancock had bought it in Cairo very cheap, and Edith hoped she would never know it was not real onyx. She need not have been afraid, for Mrs. Hancock had had her doubts on the subject, but had resolutely put them from her before she made this present.

It has been said that Elizabeth was "eager for her own sincerity" in wishing to know that Edith was happy. That expresses with fair accuracy the measure of her success in trying not to judge Edith. It may be taken also as the epitaph on the grave where her jealousy of her was buried. The cynic is at liberty to reflect that since Edward did not love his wife she had no cause for jealousy.

Of all the virtues that lift the eyes of men to the hills, patience is the least admired, has the least to attract the attention and thus earn the encouragement of others, and yet none is more certain of its results. Never does it fail in putting forth its fruits in due season, nor in accomplishing its perfect work. But for the most part its growth is imperceptible; it does not shoot up like the aloe flower, nor challenge attention from the brilliance of its blossoming; and, like the violet, it hides its lovely fragrance, and those who observe carelessly and without love are usually quite unaware of its blossoming. It trumpets forth no deeds of valour, it fills the stage with no heroic attitudes and splendid speeches; and only those who watch tenderly and closely can see the growth of its sweet-smelling purple. It was not a matter

for wonder then that Mrs. Fanshawe, eagerly intent on herself, interested in her own grief and bereavement, and marvellously anxious that others should be (if possible) equally interested in them, should have observed nothing of this modest flowering, not even now, when on this languid April day Elizabeth's plot was thick with the flowers of her silent gardening. Indeed, she was disposed to blame her stepdaughter for many omissions in her general conduct. There was much to be desired in her that she did not get. When she played to her, so to speak, Elizabeth was not always ready to dance ; when she mourned Elizabeth did not always weep. She took but a tepid interest in Mrs. Fanshawe's brilliant and absorbing economies, and though she was always ready to go on searching through Army Lists, she did not bring to that employment the eager zeal which might have been expected from one who had just lost so well-beloved a father. Worse still, when Mrs. Fanshawe's voice sometimes broke and her eyes filled with self-pitying tears, as she read aloud to Elizabeth some fresh and pathetic page of the memoir, describing how her father had sat up till half-past three on two consecutive nights so that his wife should have her fill of dancing, Elizabeth seemed as hard as adamant over this poignant recollection. Indeed, Elizabeth had tried to persuade her (quite unsuccessfully) to cut out from the preface the concluding paragraph which began " Out of the depths of my broken heart I wish to thank all those friends whose sympathy has supported me in my bereavement."

Indeed, Mrs. Fanshawe was afraid that she had not been far astray when, on first marrying, she

had formed the conclusion that Elizabeth was a selfish sort of girl. She had believed then that she had a great affection for her father (who really rather spoiled her) and had tried, the dear fellow, to spoil his wife as well : but now, so quietly did Elizabeth take her bereavement, she was afraid that, after all, her affection for her father was not so very deep. Otherwise she must have found the writing of the memoir a work at which it was an agonizing yet exquisite pleasure to assist. Otherwise, again, Elizabeth could not have been so remarkably industrious in her music : she could not, within a couple of months of her father's death, begin a course of instruction in the piano at the Royal Institute. She would have been unable to give her mind, as she was undoubtedly doing, to this very nice accomplishment of playing the piano, but have immured herself in the privacy of Oakley Street, and refused to see anybody but her stepmother, to whom she must have been irresistibly drawn by the bond of their common sorrow. Incidentally, too, these music lessons seemed to Mrs. Fanshawe very expensive for the gratification of a mere luxurious whim, and the thought of them often impelled her to distant economical expeditions, implying a huge expense in taxi-cabs. It was on one of these that she had gone out this afternoon, the object being to purchase large quantities of violet soap, so cheap if you bought a large box of it, and other little things that would probably occur to her, from a shop in High Holborn. Though the distance was considerable, Elizabeth was surprised she was not back by the time the servant brought up tea ; but since she might return any moment,

and be querulous over the fact that tea was not made, she prepared it, risking the other possibility that it might be cold when her stepmother returned, who would then drink it with the air of a martyr, or be compelled, though she hated extravagance and unnecessary trouble to servants, to order a fresh teapot. One of the two was likely, since, as has been mentioned, the open space at the back of the house had been for the last fortnight the horrid little backyard.

But an agreeable surprise was in store. Mrs. Fanshawe came in before long in the most excellent spirits, full of affection and tenderness.

"And my dear little musical Cinderella has made tea," she said, "all ready for her wicked stepmother! Darling, you should have come out with me, it is the loveliest day; you are too industrious. Perhaps this evening you will play to me something you have been so diligently practising."

Elizabeth poured out tea.

"I'm afraid I haven't been so very industrious, mamma," she said. "I've been sitting in the window nearly an hour doing nothing."

"Ah, it is not doing nothing to enjoy this sweet breeze and look at the daffodils in our sweet little garden. My dear, what a good cup of tea! Nobody makes tea like you. I often say it."

She often did, though with quite a different *nuance*. But clearly the days of the horrid little backyard were over for the present.

"Such an afternoon as I have had, dear," she continued. "You would never guess all the things that have happened to me. Who should I meet,

for instance, in Isaacs and Redford's but your Aunt Julia, so pleasant and full of welcome! And nothing would content her but that I must promise to bring you down to stay with her next Friday over the Sunday. Her dear little Elizabeth, she called you. We quite quarrelled over that. I said you were my dear little Elizabeth. She has been so busy, she said, since her return from Egypt in February, getting things straight after her long absence or she would have asked me many times before. I never thought it odd, I am glad to say, that she had not done so; I always refrained from wondering at it, though, to be sure, three months is a long time to take putting things straight after an absence of two. But now she quite insists on it; she simply would not let me go until I had promised, and she will send her motor to the station to meet whatever train we settle to travel by."

Here was a prospect that had long daunted Elizabeth to look forward to, yet of necessity it must sometime come close to her. She had not so much as seen Edward since he handed her the telegram last August in Mrs. Hancock's drawing-room; he and she, tacitly contriving together in sundered co-operation, had averted that. Her heart leaped and sank and leaped again; she shrank from seeing him, and had not known till now, when in the natural course of events she must see him, how much she longed to. On her side there was no reasonable excuse to urge against the plan, and had there been she hardly knew whether she would have urged it. On his side, he might escape the meeting, say that he had arranged to take Edith away for the Sunday, but she felt

sure that if he understood that she had consented to go down to her aunt's he would not absent himself. He waited, so she instinctively knew, for a sign that she was willing to meet him. Otherwise he would long ago have been to see her. She quite understood his absence and his silence.

Any sign of emotion that might have escaped her was certainly not seen by her stepmother, who was full of the wonders of this afternoon. But Elizabeth felt that something beyond this invitation to Heathmoor had occurred to send Mrs. Fanshawe's mental barometer up to such exhilarated serenity of fair weather, and she waited for it to be told her. It did not come at once; she mentioned first the other objects on which some ray had beamed which gilded and transfigured them.

"Such a long and dear talk I had with her," she went on, "and she begged, if it did not hurt me too much, to bring down all the memoirs that I have written to read to her quietly. After she had gone I bought the soap and the other little things I wanted, which were even cheaper than I had anticipated, and you never would guess, dear, how I came back here. Perhaps you will scarcely believe it when I tell you, for I got on the top of a 'bus, with my great box of soap and my other parcels, and came all the way right to the Chelsea Town Hall for threepence, not counting the sixpence with which I tipped the conductor, who was most obliging and helped me with my things. Really very polite! In spite of my packages, he of course saw I was not just a common woman like the rest of the passengers, and I hesitated whether I ought to have given him

a shilling. But I have never enjoyed making a little economy and denying myself comforts more than I did when I got up on that 'bus."

No, it was not the 'bus ride, so thought Elizabeth, that had produced this exhilaration and pleasure. She waited.

"But before I got up on to my 'bus I gave myself just a little treat," Mrs. Fanshawe proceeded, "and went into one of those electric palaces, as they call them, where you see the cinematograph. I was not quite sure whether it was the sort of thing that is thought respectable, and so I looked pretty closely at the programme before I entered. But I need not have been afraid; I never saw anything more refined, and you and I will go together one of these days, dear. So cheap, too; only a shilling. Why, you could go every day for a week and not spend more than in one evening in the dress-circle at the theatre."

Mrs. Fanshawe looked up at Elizabeth with that glance of soft, shy helplessness which many men found so provocatively feminine and pleading, and called forth the instinct of protection in their somewhat unobservant minds. For, on the whole, nobody was less in need of protection than she; she was almost aggressively able to take care of herself.

"And I didn't have to carry my parcels after all," she said, "from where the 'bus stopped, for whom should I see just coming out of the chemist's there but that dear Sir Henry Meyrick, who was Commander-in-Chief in India. Do you remember? He came home only a couple of days ago on leave, and will be here till January. He

stayed with us once at Peshawar, darling, in those happy, happy days ! "

Mrs. Fanshawe took out her handkerchief and dabbed the corners of her eyes. This was a piece of ritual that had lost its practical significance (for there was not the semblance of moisture there), and was merely the outward and visible sign of an inward grief.

" I stayed with him afterwards at Simla," she said, " and got, oh, so fond of him ! It was while I was staying there, you know, that the news came that caused my poor heart to break. My dear, he was like a woman for tenderness to me, and yet he had the strength of a man ; and I can never, never forget what I owe dear Sir Henry. If it had not been for him I am convinced I should quite have broken down, or even made away with myself."

Elizabeth felt sure that she had here the origin of the wonderful rise in her stepmother's spirits. And an idea, horrible to contemplate, came close to her and stared her in the face. She resolutely turned away from it.

" Yes, I remember him quite well," she said. " I thought you found him rather foolish and ridiculous."

" Foolish and ridiculous ! " said Mrs. Fanshawe, with great energy. " I cannot imagine what you mean, Elizabeth. You must be confusing him with some one else."

" Perhaps I am," said the girl. " It is stupid of me. How was he looking? "

Mrs. Fanshawe calmed down at once and became softly pathetic again.

" Oh, so different to what he was when you saw

him," she said, "when he was so cheery and jolly, and made all the women in Peshawar fall in love with him. At least, I am sure that I did. He looked so anxious and unhappy, Elizabeth, that my heart quite went out to him, and I longed to comfort him. And he brightened up so when he saw me; he looked quite radiant again. And you will never guess what a pretty welcome he gave me, though of course it was very foolish of him. He said, 'My dear little girl—my dear little girl!' twice over, just like that. And he held out both his hands to me, and dropped his umbrella in a puddle and never seemed to notice it. And there was I with my arms full of great heavy parcels. I declare for a moment I was quite ashamed before so true a gentleman as Sir Henry is. And he took all the parcels from me—and oh, my dear, it was so wonderful to me in my loneliness in the crowded streets to be taken care of again like that!—and carried them right up to the door, and gave them to Mary when she opened it. He would not let me touch them again myself."

Again the idea stood close to Elizabeth, holding her, so it seemed, not letting her turn her face away. And the soft, childlike voice went on.

"He asked after you, too," she said, "so nicely and affectionately. He would not come in then, for he had some other appointment; and though he wanted to break it I did not let him. But he is coming to dine here to-night. I shall not think of making any extra preparation for him. He will like it best just to see me in my quiet, modest little house just naturally."

There was a moment's rather awkward pause,

for Mrs. Fanshawe had to consider how to re-introduce a topic that had been spoken of that morning between her and Elizabeth in hours of the "horrid little backyard." Elizabeth had wanted to go to the Queen's Hall to attend a concert of the most ravishing character that was to be performed that night, but had given up the idea owing to a marked querulousness on her step-mother's part at the prospect of passing a deserted evening. There had even been pained wonder at the girl caring to go out to an evening of pleasure so soon. But she was not apt to be troubled at her own inconsistencies, and the pause was not long.

"He will be sorry not to see you, I am sure, darling," she said, "but I think you told me you were going to a concert at the Queen's Hall. Very likely you will not be in till nearly eleven, and you may be sure I shall have a nice cosy little supper ready for you when you come back."

To Elizabeth this seemed but to confirm the idea that had forced itself on her; it needed, at any rate, little perspicacity to see that her stepmother, with the prospect of dining alone with Sir Henry, wanted her to keep the engagement which, in deference to her desire, she had abandoned. Nor was she surprised at the tenderness that followed. Mrs. Fanshawe rose in willowy fashion from her chair and stood behind Elizabeth's, gently stroking her hair.

"I want you to enjoy all the pleasures that I can contrive for you, dear," she said. "He whom we both miss so dreadfully, I know would wish us to enjoy—'richly to enjoy,' does

not the Bible say? He would have hated to think that we were going to lose all our gaiety and happiness."

Elizabeth felt physically unable to bear the touch of that insincere, caressing hand. She got up quickly.

"Yes, mamma," she said; "I am sure of that. I have tried not to lose the joy of life."

"So right, darling!" said Mrs. Fanshawe, in a dreadful little cooing voice. "And we have helped each other, I hope, in that. I know you have helped me. I will not let my life be spoiled and broken; it would grieve him so."

She paused a moment with handkerchief-ritual, and, with her head a little on one side, spoke with childlike timidity.

"It was lovely being taken care of again," she said, "though only in a little matter like having a parcel carried. Are you going now, dear? Enjoy yourself, my sweetest, and stop till the very end of your concert. I know what a treat music is to you; I would not have you miss a note."

Elizabeth felt the need of air after this interview, and having an hour yet to spare before she need think of going to the concert, went down the broad, quiet street and on to the Thames Embankment at its lower end. She felt stifled by this atmosphere of insincerity from which she had come; she choked at the pitiful nauseating deception that she believed almost deceived her stepmother and caused her to refer to the duty of behaving as her late husband would have had her behave, at all her little subterfuges for facilitating her own arrange-

ments. The falseness of it all was so blatant, so palpable that it would not have deceived a baby, and yet Elizabeth was not wrong in thinking that it largely deceived the very author of it. Her acting might not appear at all life-like to her audience, but it seemed real to herself. For years she had, while diligently pursuing paths of complete selfishness, been employed, so to speak, on modelling a figure of herself, that was winning, child-like, and trustingly devoted to the love of others, and now regarding that, with conscious approval, she had come to believe that it was the very image of herself. And Elizabeth felt sure (and again was not mistaken) that Mrs. Fanshawe was even now getting herself into another graceful pose for the reception of Sir Henry. To say that she was deliberately laying herself out to attract him would have been the coarsely true way of putting it, but things that were coarse and things that were true were almost equally abhorrent to Mrs. Fanshawe's mind. She told herself that she owed a great debt to Sir Henry for his kindness and sympathy at her husband's death, a debt that she would never be able to repay. She was bound to treat him as an old friend, to confide in him her plans for the future ; to tell him how she was " oh, so content " to live quietly here, devoting her life to Elizabeth, who was so sweet to her. And she would somehow make it appear that it was her own sweetness, not Elizabeth's, that she was really talking about. She would hint that she was a great deal alone, but that it was by her own wish that Elizabeth spent so many evenings enjoying herself with hearing music. Elizabeth was right, " oh, so right ! " to do it. And

Elizabeth, thinking over these things, executed a few wild dance steps on a lonely piece of the Embankment, from sheer irritation at the thought. She wondered also whether her stepmother would show Sir Henry the written chapters of the Memoir. She rather thought not.

This little ebullition of temper passed, and she let her mind quiet down again as she leaned her elbows on the stone balustrade and looked out over the beautiful river, which brimmed and swirled just below, for the tide, near to full flood, was pouring up from the sea, still fresh and strong and unwearied by its journey. Barges were drifting up with it in a comfortable, haphazard sort of fashion, and a great company of sea-gulls hovered near, chiding and wheeling together. The hour was a little after sunset, and the whole sky was bright with mackerel-markings of rosy cloud, and the tawny river, reflecting these, was covered with glows and gleams. Opposite, the trees in the park were dim in the mist of fresh green that lay over them, blurring the outlines which all the winter had stood stark and clear-cut under cold, grey skies. And the triumphant tide of spring-time which flushed everything with the tingle of new growth, unfolding the bells of the tulips in the patches of riverside garden, and making the sparrows busy with gathering sticks and straws for their nestings, sent a sudden thrill through Elizabeth's heart, and she was conscious again, as she had not been for many weary weeks, of the youth and glory of the world. From the great sea of life came the vivifying wave, covering for the moment the brown seaweed tangle of her trouble that had lain dry and sun-baked so long, flushing and freshening and uplifting it.

Relieved of its irritation, and refreshed by this good moment of spring evening, her mind went back to her stepmother. She felt sure that it was her intention to marry that jolly old warrior, if it could possibly be managed, and that she was going to employ all her art in the shape of her artlessness and simplicity to bring that about. It was but eight months since her husband had died, but, after all, what did that matter? The actual lapse of time had very little to do with the question, and she would be sure to have touching and convincing reasons for such a step. It had seemed horrible at first to Elizabeth, but where, after all, was the horror? Of course, her dead husband would have wished her to be happy. Elizabeth knew her father well enough to know that, and it was only horrible that she should give (as she undoubtedly would) as a reason for her marrying again what she knew his wishes would be on the subject. Whether Sir Henry would be brought up to the point was another matter, and on this Elizabeth had no evidence except her stepmother's account of their meeting. But clearly Mrs. Fanshawe thought that things promised well.

Elizabeth's eyes suddenly filled with tears. Only once had the grass sprung up on that far-distant grave ; not yet had the Memoir, so quickly taken in hand, been completed.

" Daddy, daddy ! " she said aloud.

She turned from the rosy river, and set out to walk down the Embankment to the next bridge, from where she proposed to take the conveyance that had thrilled her stepmother that afternoon with a sense of incredible adventure. The pavement stretched empty and darkening in front of her,

and at the far end the lamplighter had started on his luminous round. Some two hundred yards off a figure was walking quickly towards her, and long before she could distinguish face or feature, Elizabeth, with heart in sudden tumult, saw who it was. Almost at the same moment she saw him pause suddenly in his rapid progress, and halt as if undetermined whether or no to turn and retrace his steps. But he came on again, and soon they stood face to face. All the tumult in her had died down again ; she held out her hand with the friendliest, most unembarrassed smile.

"At last, Edward!" she said. "And we shall meet again soon. Aunt Julia has asked mamma and me down for next Sunday."

He looked at her a moment without speaking. She saw that his breath came quickly as if he had been running.

"I know. She told me she was going to write," he said.

"She met mamma this afternoon, and said it instead."

"Must I go away?" he asked. "Of course I will if you wish it. But—but mayn't I see you again?"

At his voice, at the entreaty in his eyes, all but her love for him, unstained and bright-burning, vanished utterly.

"Yes, why not, if you want to?" she said. "But I shall understand so well if you do not."

"I have wanted nothing else every day," he said.

All her heart went out to him.

"Aren't you happy, dear?" she said.

"How can you ask that?"

"I'm sorry," she said simply. "And Edith?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything about her. I try to be kind and nice to her. In fact I am."

A wretched, quivering smile broke out on the girl's face.

"Conceit!" she said. "I'm glad we have met, Edward, for we had to get this over, you know. Well, it's over."

They stood in silence a moment. Then suddenly he broke out—

"Why wouldn't you trust your own heart, Elizabeth, and let me trust mine? What good has come of it all? What has come of it but wretchedness? I don't ask if you are happy. I know you aren't."

"No. But you kept faith. That good has come of it. Don't say those things. It isn't the best of you that says them. And what are you doing here?"

"I often walk this way," he said. "Then I go up Oakley Street. The evenings are getting light now. Do you mind my doing that?"

Then something swelled in her throat forbidding speech.

"I—I must go on," she said at length.

"May I walk with you a little?"

"To the corner. I shall take a 'bus there."

There was but a little way to go, and they stood together, waiting for the 'bus, looking at the darkling river, down which poured the wild west wind.

"Sea-gulls," she said to him, pointing. "Sea-gulls and spring, Edward."

And she mounted quickly up the winding iron stairs, not looking back. But as the 'bus swung round a corner a little distance up the road she could not resist turning round. He was still there at the corner where she had left him, a minute speck on the pavement that glowed in the rose-coloured sunset, so minute, so significant. It seemed to her that all of her essential self, her heart, her power of love, was standing there with him ; that he gazed but at an empty wraith of herself who sat on the pounding, swaying 'bus, while she stood by his side as the spring evening darkened and the sea-gulls hovered and wheeled.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GRISLY KITTENS

ELIZABETH, as requested by her stepmother, did not leave her concert that night until the very last note of all had died away. But it is doubtful whether that request had very much to do with it : the probability is that she was really incapable of doing so. Just as the hypnotized subject has his will taken possession of by his controller, so that all his wishes, his intentions, his desires are for the time in abeyance and the independence of his own powers completely paralysed, so that night Elizabeth was taken captive by the power of sound. Many times before she had felt that she was penetrating into a new kingdom, a fresh province of thought and feeling, but to-night a more surprising adventure held her bound. She penetrated into no fresh kingdoms, she saw no new peaks upraise themselves or valleys carve themselves at her feet. She was completely in familiar places ; only a fresh light, one that for her had never lit sea or land, shone on them, which transfigured them not by fantastic effects and the sensationalism of musical limelights, but with the dawning as of the everlasting day.

She was unconsciously prepared for this, as she had never been before. She, or a hundred others whose souls were steeped with the love of melody,

might have heard just what she heard that night, and have had their tastes gratified, their emotions roused, without being gripped in this manner so supreme, so enlightening. New sensations might have flitted through her, new beauties been perceived, new glories been manifested, without this ethical perception being awakened. But with her to-night, all the quiet patience of these past months, of the succession of dark and difficult days, to solve the meaning of which she had applied herself with efforts and strivings after the light, so unremitting, so unnoticed, had rendered her capable of receiving the true illumination. Cell by cell, she had stored honey in the dark ; now with the coming of spring, the workers of her soul swarmed out with rush of joyous wings into the light. She was charged to the brim with supersaturated waters ; it wanted but the one atom the more to be added that should solidify all that had been put into her, all that by the grace of God she had gathered. Probably the meeting with Edward gave her the last crystal of the salt, took out from her love the grain of bitterness that still lurked there. That made her ready to receive the ultimate gift that music has to bring, namely, the identification of it with all other noble effort, the perception of its truth, which is one with the truth of everything that is beautiful, and is lit by the light that illuminates the whole world, and turns it into the garden of God. Never again in those on whom one gleam of the light has shone can it be wholly quenched. For the future they know from their own selves, from the recollection of the one thing in the world which it is impossible to forget, that whatever storms of adversity, thunder-

clouds of trouble lower, there is no such thing any more for them as a darkness quite untransfused, no place so slippery that they can doubt whether their feet are set on a rock and their goings ordered.

The hall was but half-filled, and Elizabeth, seated at the back of the amphitheatre, saw she would be uncumbered with the distraction of near neighbours. The concert opened with the Third Symphony of Brahms, and immediately she was carried into it. Even as one who looks at some superb statue has his mind modelled, as it were, into the image of what he sees, so that his body can, faintly following, unconsciously drop into a pose somewhat like it, so, listening to this, she was made one with it, fused into it, so that, while it sang its message to her, she knew of no existence separate from it. Her mind, her nature became part of it ; she, like a sheet of calm waters, burned with the glories of the melodious sky. She became godlike, as she inhaled that ampler ether of glorified intellect through music, which perhaps alone of the arts can make wholly visible to the spiritual eye the wonder and the beauty of pure and abstract thought. No longer did its melodies suggest images to her ; her brain strove not after similes to express, as it were, in mere black and white the effect of the rainbow song ; it revealed itself, mind.

Then the hall swam into sight again ; there was applause. It sounded quite meaningless ; you did not clap your hands when daylight came.

There were but three items in the programme, and for the second, the grand piano in front of the stage was opened. The player was familiar enough to her, he with his magical fingers and

exuberant youth, but just now he seemed a detached and impersonal figure, as nameless as the viol-holding cherubim in a canvas of Bellini, who make music for the reverie of the saints and angels who stand on either side of the Mother of God. But it was no song of heavenly soul and sexless quires that he was to sing ; he was the interpreter of the joy of life and of love and of the myriad emotions that spring like flowers from the fruitful earth. Brahms had revealed what is possible to the wise mind of man, here in the great concerto Tschaikowsky poured out the inspired tale of its emotions ; the splendour of their shining, the tenderness of their reveries. Instantly in the presence of this more concrete, more frail and human music the images leaped and danced again in Elizabeth's mind. The noonday shone on the innumerable smile of a blue sea ; high above the sultry plain were fixed the spear-heads of Chitral ; the dusk fell on the Indian garden with its tangle of Peshawar roses. More personal yet grew the appeal. She walked with her father there ; she showed him, as never yet had it been given her to show him, how love had touched her, even as he had said, with its enchantment, how the loyalty of her renunciation of its material fulfilment had not withered its stem, but caused it to blossom with a rarer and more fragrant flowering. She told him how the bitter waters had been sweetened, how the sting had been sheathed, how through darkness love had felt its way up to the day. With tender glance at the pain of it that was passed they dwelt on it ; with smiles for her miscomprehension of its growth, for her ignorance of where it led they traced its springing tendrils,

on which there were the traces of healed scars where it had bled. But its bleeding was over, and strong grew its shoots over unsightly places. The whole world danced together, not men and women only, not only boys and girls, but sun and sea and sky, and the lions in the desert and the tigers burning bright in the jungle. The peaks and ledges of untrodden snow danced in a whirling magical maze of rhythmic movement. The angels of God joined in it ; the devils of hell would have done so had there been such things as devils, or such a place as hell. Again the music grew more personal. All she had ever known of joy, and that was much, was marshalled round her, and through the dancers, this crowd of earthly elements, came he whom every nerve and agent of perception in her body loved. Her human power of emotion leaped to the supremest arc of that rainbow curve, and with him stood there poised. By some divine right he was hers, by a right no less divine he was separated from her. Yet that separation was somehow one with the union.

Then followed a pause of some ten minutes. But no reaction came to her, for it was no mimic show that was now over, no feigned dramatic presentment that she had watched or listened to (she hardly knew which), but something quite real, more real than the rows of dark red stalls, than the shaded scarlet lights, like huge inverted anemones, which hung above the orchestra, more real even than the actual music itself, which was but the husk or at most the temporary embodiment of the truth that underlay and illumined it. She had been shown the vision of mind at its highest,

of emotion in its supremest degree. There was something still lacking, which should bind them together, exhibit them, as they truly were, parts of an infinite whole. She knew what was coming, and with the tenseness of an expectation that must be fulfilled, with a suspense that was not the less for the certainty of its coming resolution, she waited.

Half an hour later she came out into the mellow spring night, that teemed with the promise of the south-west wind. Just as the Brahms symphony had summed up for her the glory of mind, and the Tschaikowsky concerto had sung of the depth and sunlit splendours of human emotion, so the Good Friday music had bridged and connected the two, and shown her whence came the light that shone on them. But whereas the concerto had led her through generalities to its culmination of the appeal to her own individual personality, and its needs and longings, in this she was led across the dim threshold of herself, so to speak, into the halls that were full of light, into the house of many mansions. Vivid and ecstatic at first had been the sense of her own intense experience ; she was bathed in sun and sea, and then was opened to her a communion of soul with those she loved that transcended all she had ever felt before. And yet, very soon, that faded into nothingness, it passed off the shield of her perception, as a breath is dispersed in frosty air ; soon she was no longer the centre of her consciousness, but only an atom of infinite insignificance in it. It was no revelation of herself that was thus manifested, yet inasmuch as she was part of the vital essence of the love that crowned the human understanding, the human passions, inasmuch as she could give

thanks for its great glory, that glory was part of her, her love part of it. One and indivisible it stirred in her, even as it moved the sun and all the stars. . . .

It was with no sense of interruptions or of a broken mood that she came out into the jostling of the populous streets, for truth is not a mood, and they with their crowded pavements and whirring roadways were part of it also, and knew her solemn and joyful secret. Without doubt she would not always be able to feel with the same vividness of perception that the eternal peace encompassed her, but, having once realized it, she knew that it would be there always, a sure refuge, that it was the answer to all the riddles and difficulties that life assuredly would continue to ply her with. Again and again, she knew, they would puzzle and perplex her, again and again she would be mist-blinded by them. But she had seen an authentic glimpse, as from Pisgah, of the kingdom to which led the royal roads. They might wind over stony hill-sides, be packed with sand, or clogged with resistant mire, but they led to the promised land, to the kingdom that was within, the gates of which stood open night and day, for all who willed to enter.

It was late, already after eleven, when she dismounted from the 'bus at the corner of Oakley Street, and she half expected to find that her stepmother had gone to bed. It must be allowed that Elizabeth would not have been very sorry if this proved to be the case, for she felt that she could give but a vague attention to the voluble trivialities that would otherwise await her. But not till she had softly closed the street door behind

her, did she bring into focus the fact that Mrs. Fanshawe had been dining alone with Sir Henry, or that the voluble trivialities might be supplanted by news not trivial at all.

The idea when first it had occurred to her had repelled her, with the repulsion that a deep love must naturally feel for any self-conscious and shallow affection. There was a sort of heart-breaking jar in the thought that Mrs. Fanshawe, with her pen still dipping for ink to write the Memoir, should be thinking about re-marriage. But now the repulsion had left her ; she found herself less jealous for her father's memory, more ready to let the immortality of love look after itself, more capable of sinking her personal feeling. It was not that the idea had lost its sharp edges from her greater familiarity with it ; she saw it as distinctly as ever ; only the sharp edges now failed to fret her. Besides, how could the shallowness of her stepmother's affections, the insincerity that in itself was of so unreal a nature, affect anything that was real?

Mrs. Fanshawe had not gone to bed, but was sitting in a very pretty pensive attitude (hastily assumed when she heard Elizabeth's step on the stairs) over a brisk little fire, in front of which was standing in the fender a small covered dish. She had put on a white bedroom wrapper with little black bows of ribbon ; her long, abundant hair streamed over her shoulders ; there was never so bewitching a little widow. She held out her arm with a welcoming gesture as Elizabeth entered.

" Darling, how late you are ! " she said. " But if you have been enjoying yourself that is all I ask of you. I could not bear to think that my

little Elizabeth should come in and find a silent house, with no one to welcome her home."

She got up and gave Elizabeth a little butterfly kiss.

"See, dear, I lit the fire for you with my own hands, so that your supper might keep warm. There is a napkin which I spread for a tablecloth, and a little rack of toast, and some lemonade with plenty of sugar in it, and just the wing of a chicken, which I saved for you, and ate a leg myself instead. And a little bunch of grapes to follow and some gingerbread cake. And while you eat, dear, you shall tell me all about your concert. Fancy if some day you played at a concert at the Queen's Hall. How proud I should be! And should I not burst my gloves in applauding?"

To "tell all about the concert" was a somewhat extensive suggestion, but there was no need for Elizabeth to reply, as Mrs. Fanshawe went on without pause.

"I could not attend to anything, dear," she said, "until I had quite settled in my mind what would be the nicest little supper I could think of for you. I had quite a little squabble with Sir Henry about eating a leg myself, though I assured him that all epicures prefer the leg. And he helped me to light the fire; I assure you, he was as zealous on your behalf as I was. And he told me to be sure and give you his love, if I did not think you would consider that a liberty."

"Thank you, mamma," said the girl. "And it was good of you to take so much thought for me. I almost expected to find you had gone to bed; I am so late. I suppose Sir Henry has been gone some time?"

"A quarter of an hour ago perhaps. I had not more than time to take off my dress and brush my hair. But I could not go without a peep at you when you returned. And I promised myself a little cosy talk over the fire when you had finished your supper."

Elizabeth left the table and sat down in a big arm-chair near Mrs. Fanshawe. The latter took Elizabeth's hand as it lay on the arm, and held it in both of hers.

"I have been thinking of you so much, dear," she said, "all the time dear Sir Henry was here. You have been in my mind every minute. Such a wise, kind man he is, and so full of sympathy and tenderness for me. And he shows it with such wonderful tact, not by dwelling on my great loss, but by encouraging me and cheering me up. I declare I laughed outright as I have not done for months at some of his delicious, droll stories. He is the sort of man to whom one can open one's heart completely. All kinds of things we talked about—about old, dear, happy days, and about India, and oh, Elizabeth, how I long to see dear India again! He quoted something which I thought so true, about hearing the East a-calling, and said it ought to be 'when you hear the East a-bawling.' Was not that quaint of him? The East a-bawling! Yes. That is just what it does. Dear, happy days in India, with all its pleasant parties and society and balls! I miss the gaiety of it all in our sad, secluded life here in this little tiny house. Why, the drawing-room is not much bigger than my bathroom was at Peshawar. I think that I am naturally of a gay and joyous nature, dear. I was not made for sadness."

Apparently Mrs. Fanshawe was taking a rest from thinking about Elizabeth all the evening. She seemed to realize this and hurried back to her subject.

"And if it is sad for me, how much more sad it must be for you, darling, for you used to enjoy yourself so in India with your horses and dogs. I am sure you used to laugh fifty times a day out there, for once that I hear you laugh now. But it is not only of your loss of gaiety that I have been thinking so much. There are things more important than that, especially while you are young. The loss of your father's care and thought for you makes such a dreadful blank, and I, weighed down with all the petty cares and economies which we have to practise, cannot look after you as constantly as I used. My days are so full with the care of the house, and with writing your dear father's Memoir, which all these weeks has been to me nothing less than a sacred duty. And even if I was quite free, it would be impossible for me, a little weak, silly, helpless woman, to supervise your growing up with the wisdom and large grasp of a man. I have been doing my best, I think I can say that, but I know how feeble and wanting my best has been."

There had been no opportunity, so continuous had been the prattle of this monologue, for Elizabeth to speak at all. For this she was grateful, for she would have found it difficult enough to frame any sincere reply to this endless tissue of insincerities that were only half-conscious of themselves. Mrs. Fanshawe had been so long accustomed to look upon the utterly inaccurate picture of herself, of which she was the artist, so long

unaccustomed to look on the actual origin of it, that she really had got to confuse the two, or, rather, to obliterate the one in favour of the imaginary portrait. But to-night Elizabeth did not feel the smallest resentment at this imposture ; she regarded her mother as she would have regarded some charade-acting child, and was willing to encourage its belief in the reality of its acting. For Mrs. Fanshawe, as for a child, this dressing-up was real. And Elizabeth could almost see her father listening with a smile that for all its tenderness did not lack humour. He would have been amused, surely, at it all. For all his own simplicity and sincerity, he had never wanted to improve and edify others. At the most he only encouraged them, like the beloved plants in his garden, to grow and blossom. Besides, he had loved his wife (for the life of her Elizabeth had never been able to guess why), and that simple fact—a fact which no one should try to explain away—took precedence of everything else.

There was a pause for a few gentle applications of a very small lace handkerchief, and it became incumbent on Elizabeth to say something. She knew, of course, perfectly well what her stepmother was leading up to, and since she appeared to find it difficult to come to the point, Elizabeth decided to help her.

"And so you and Sir Henry—— " she began.

That was quite enough. Mrs. Fanshawe rose swiftly from her chair, bent over her, and kissed her.

"My darling, yes," she said. "And I am so glad you have guessed. I was so afraid it would come as a shock to you, that I only promised Henry that I would tell you to-night, if I could.

I said he must trust to my instinct, as to whether I should not only begin to prepare you for it. I told him that he could not know, as I knew, how deeply you loved your father, and that I must judge whether to tell you at once or not. I said I would not wound my dear little Elizabeth's heart for anything. But now you have guessed, how nice that is! And, oh, what a true and wise friend and second father you will find in him, Elizabeth! Do you wonder now, my darling, that I said how much I had been thinking of you all this evening!"

Suddenly it was borne in upon the girl that this play-acting was really going too far. It seemed impermissible to allow even a child to take its inventions quite so seriously. It was as if the child insisted on having real solid food and real champagne provided for its pasteboard banquet. Yet, yet—was there any gain to any one in saying, "Remember, you are only acting?" She knew well there was not. Detection and exposure of even such abominable insincerities as these never yet did any good to the—the criminal. It only made her resent the cruel perspicacity of their exposer, or possibly exercise a little more ingenuity in their inventions. She would be wiser to enter into the spirit of these imaginative flights. But it was like seeing somebody waving his arms, saying, "See, I am a bird; how high I fly!" and pretending to look upwards and be dazzled and made giddy by this reckless feat of aviation.

"It was sweet of you to think of me as well," was as much as could humanly be expected of the best intentions.

That did not nearly satisfy Mrs. Fanshawe.

"My dear, my central thought was of you," she declared. "Almost the first thing I said to Henry when—when he would not let me go, for he has such an affectionate nature, and oh, my darling, how he loves me!—almost the first thing I said was, 'What about Elizabeth? You must not think that I have said yes to you until you assure me that you will be a father to Elizabeth.' And he said—it was so like him—'We'll offer her a grandfather, anyhow, Birdie.' That was what he said he must call me—his bright-eyed little Birdie—so foolish of him."

The clock on the chimney-piece chimed twelve, and Mrs. Fanshawe rose to an apex of surprising fatuity.

"Gracious me, what an hour!" she said. "I believe I have not sat up till twelve this last two months. We must go to bed, or Henry will find a dull-eyed little Birdie when he comes back in the morning, and will never love her any more. He will think he has made a great mistake, and want to marry Elizabeth instead. Dear Henry! I shall tease him about that but only just for a minute. I would not vex his big, loving heart for anything."

She looked at Elizabeth with an expression that she was familiar with in her imaginary portraits of herself, an expression which she called wistful.

"Of course I shall not dream of marrying until a whole year has passed," she said, "nor, I am sure, would my Henry wish me to. He knows what a tender heart I have for my beloved memories. But I think, dear, that I shall put the Memoir on one side, or perhaps give it to your Aunt Julia to deal with as she likes. I dare say she would

be glad of something to do in her poor, empty life. I will take it down with me on Friday. Perhaps it has done its work."

She did not explain exactly what this last sentence meant, and as there was no explanation whatever of it, except that it seemed to finish up with the Memoir in a vague and beautiful manner, it would have been idle to attempt any.

" So sleep well, my precious ! " she said, kissing Elizabeth. " I think you will do that, won't you, now that all our little anxieties are removed? He is really immensely well-off. What a responsibility that will be for me ! I hope I shall prove not quite unworthy of it."

Mrs. Hancock had never seen much of her sister-in-law, and perhaps she would not have been so kindly disposed towards the task of making herself better acquainted with her had she known that she had been pitied for her poor, empty life. For " poor, empty life " was indeed not a phrase that fitly described the passage of a pilgrim of Mr. Martin's gospel through this pleasant world. But Mrs. Hancock had no idea that so slanderous a thing had been said of her, and she looked forward to her sister-in-law's visit with considerable pleasure, which was enhanced by the prospect of having Elizabeth in the house again. She intended Elizabeth to be in the best of spirits, to play the piano to her very loudly and brightly (Mrs. Hancock knew she was just a little deaf and had seen four eminent specialists on the subject, who implored her, so she said, not to be in the least disquieted, but to eat rather less meat, as her very slight dullness of hearing was certainly gouty in

origin), to drive with her on Saturday afternoon, and to sit constantly by her and admire her masterly methods with the "King of Mexico," which had rendered thrilling so many after-dinner hours in Egypt. Then Mrs. Fanshawe should drive with her on Saturday morning, and they would have a great deal of beautiful talk about the Colonel. In her mind's eye she saw her sister-in-law crying a little, and herself with touches and caresses administering the gospel of Mr. Martin, as through a fine hose, in the most copious and refreshing abundance. When she was quite refreshed and had been made to see that death is the gate into life, no doubt she would read her part of the Memoir in which Mrs. Hancock took a great interest, seeing that she had supplied so much material for the chapter (or chapters, it was to be hoped) on his early life. She expected to enjoy the account of the early life very much, in the sort of way that a mellow sunset may be imagined to enjoy thinking over its own beautiful sunrise. And if she found Mrs. Fanshawe very sympathetic and understanding, she thought, she almost thought that she would confide in her something that she had never yet confided in anybody, and after making clear to her what her own intentions in the matter were, ask her advice, if it appeared probable that it would turn out consonant with what she herself had practically made up her mind to do.

These last six months had been crowded with incident ; Mrs. Hancock did not think any year in all her tale of forty-eight summers had held so much, except perhaps the one year when she had married and Edith had been born. For now Edith

had married, Mrs. Williams had had an operation for the removal of a small tumour, her brother had died, she had been to Egypt and had brought back scores and scores of photographs, which she pasted at intervals into large half-morocco scrap-books procured at staggering expense from the stores. She had forgotten what precisely a good many of them represented, but Edith, with her wonderful memory, usually knew, and if she did not, Mrs. Hancock, in her exquisitely neat hand, wrote under them some non-committing title such as "Temple in Upper Egypt," or "Nile in January" (which it certainly was).

All this was sensational enough, and Mrs. Hancock, had she read about a year so full of incident in a novel, would have probably felt that fiction was stranger than truth, when she was asked to believe that so many things happened really "all together." But with her another thing had happened fraught with more potential significance than them all. For the death of her brother, of whom she had seen so little for so many years, had not really strongly moved her ; Mrs. Williams had quite recovered and cooked just as well as ever ; Edith still constantly drove and lunched with her, and agitating though the pasting in of the photographs was (she had pasted one in upside down, and not noticed it till the next day when the paste was quite dry and "stuck"), she did not ever look at them again. But one event seemed likely to make a real difference to her life, for while they were at Luxor, Mrs. Martin had been suddenly taken ill with pneumonia and had died three days later. She had proved herself a charming travelling companion, and Mrs. Hancock had been very much

shocked and grieved at so sad an incident marring their holiday. But she did not break down under the bereavement ; she ordered a beautiful tombstone, though not expensive (since she knew that Mr. Martin was not very well off), and left Luxor as soon as possible, bringing back with her a large photograph of the grave. The widower, being what he was, behaved with the most characteristic fortitude and faith, and she felt that she had been permitted to be a wonderful help and consolation to him since her return. Desolate though he was, he had not let his work suffer. Indeed, he added to his ordinary duties the supervision of the choir-practices which his wife had always managed, and after a suitable interval played golf as regularly as ever. And only last Sunday he had preached the most wonderful sermon that Mrs. Hancock had ever heard on the text of "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them." Thankfulness and joy was the keynote of it, and everybody understood that the wilderness was Egypt. He showed how that in the midst of death we are in life, and that joy cometh in the morning. He had lunched with Mrs. Hancock afterwards, and she had settled that it must be printed with a purple (not black) line round the cover, and with "In Memoriam, January 4, 1913," printed on the inner leaf. He did not go away till it was time for him to take the children's service at four, but before that he had asked her if, when his broken heart was healed (it appeared to be making excellent progress), she would become in name as well as in fact the partner of his joys and sorrows. She rather thought she would, though there were a great many things to be considered first, and

she promised him his answer in a week's time. Mrs. Hancock had practically settled what that answer was to be, and at present she had told nobody, nor asked anybody's advice about it. She had, indeed, thought of seeing how Edith received the idea, but on the other hand she felt that she would not give her the encouragement she wanted. Edith, indeed, had been altogether rather discouraging for months past, ever since the party met at Cairo, and did not give the lively interest in and applause of her mother's plans which she would have liked. It was not that she seemed unhappy (if she had Mrs. Hancock would have applied the cheerful gospel to her), she simply appeared to be like a house shut up with blinds down and shutters closed. No face looked out from it ; it was also impossible to penetrate into it. Perhaps, like a caretaker, Edward had the key, but Mrs. Hancock, as already noticed, did not like to pry into affairs that might possibly prove depressing, and she had not asked for it. Besides, it was difficult to imagine any cause of unhappiness that could be hers. Edward always came home by the train just before dinner ; she expected a baby in July ; and, after a tremendous struggle with herself, Mrs. Hancock had let her have her own peerless kitchenmaid as a cook.

But she felt that she would like to tell somebody who would probably agree with her what she contemplated, and she had great hope that her sister-in-law would prove sympathetic. It had been a prepossessing trait to find her buying soap in High Holborn, and she had received with touching gratitude all the stories about Mrs. Hancock which were to go into her husband's Memoir.

But there had been a great deal to think about before she made up her mind. She had a real liking, a real admiration for her vicar, about which there was, in spite of her eight and forty years, something akin to romance. He was a very wonderful and encouraging person, and certainly she had needed encouragement in the lonely month after Edith's marriage. Again, she felt sure that he would be devoted to her comfort, and though the ecstasy of youthful love might be denied them, she did not know that she was sorry for that. She was perhaps some five years older than he, but as youthful ardour was not part of her programme, that little discrepancy of years was but of small consequence. But there were other considerations ; she could not possibly go to live at the vicarage, where the servants' entrance was close under the dining-room windows, and there was no garage. She could not also be expected to help in parish work beyond the knitting of thick mufflers, which went to warm deep-sea fishermen. But his golf-playing presented no difficulties at all. She could start rather earlier, drive him to the club-house, and pick him up on her way home. To be sure that would somewhat restrict her drives, if she always had to start and come back by the same road. Perhaps it would be better if Denton took him there first, and she could call for him. Then what was to happen to the present furniture in the vicarage, for she did not want any more in her own house? She did not intend that such difficulties should be obstacles of magnitude, but her mind, which so long had been completely taken up in affairs of detail, the whole general course

of it being already marked out, could not resist the contemplation of them. Here again a woman who went all the way to High Holborn for soap might prove both comprehending and enlightening.

Mrs. Fanshawe who, with Elizabeth, was met on the platform by Denton and by the car outside the station, was an immediate success. After the crude sort of harbourage in Oakley Street, with its small rooms and its "dreadful backyard," with its parlourmaid, who had a perennial cold and no notion of cleaning silver, this perfectly ordered house, with its smooth service and atmosphere of complete comfort, was as cream to a cat that had been living on the thinnest skim-milk. She admired, she appreciated with a childlike sort of pleasure ; ate two buns with sugar on the top at tea, because they were so delicious ("Elizabeth, darling, you must eat one of these lovely buns !") and made herself instantly popular. All the time, in the depth of her heart, she hugged the knowledge that she would so soon be in a position of extreme affluence, and a ladyship, and pitied Mrs. Hancock for her poor, empty life. Simultaneously, Mrs. Hancock felt what a treat it must be for her sister-in-law to have a few days of comfort and luxury, instead of going all the way to High Holborn to get soap a little cheaper. Having seen her brother's will in the paper, she knew exactly how much she and Elizabeth had to live upon at five per cent. of the capital, and, doubting whether they got more than four, was warmed with a sense of her own benevolence in saving them three days of household books at the cost of a third-class ticket (she felt sure they had gone third-class) to Heathmoor. It was dreadfully sad

for the poor thing to be left a widow, and it was not to be expected that she would find a second husband very easily. But her cordial admiration of all she saw was certainly prepossessing ; Mrs. Hancock felt that she would probably prove a worthy recipient of her secret, and give exactly the advice she wanted. More metaphysically each of them felt drawn to the other by the striking similarity between them in the point of their lack of sincerity, and the success they both achieved in deceiving themselves.

The three dined alone that night, and soon after her stepmother having discovered that her sweetest Elizabeth looked tired, the two elder ladies were left alone.

"And now, my dear," said Mrs. Hancock (they had got to my-dearing each other before dinner was half over), "I so want to have a good talk to you. I want to know all your plans, and all about the Memoir, which I am sure will be most interesting. Shall I lay out a patience, while we talk? I can attend perfectly while I am playing one of the easier patiences. Elizabeth, too, it is such a joy to see Elizabeth again, after the sad, sad parting in the summer."

Mrs. Fanshawe put her head a little on one side wistfully.

"Elizabeth can hardly talk of the happy weeks she spent here," she said, "and I'm sure I don't wonder at her enjoyment of them. My dear, how happy it must make you to make everybody around you so happy. I don't believe you ever think of yourself."

Mrs. Hancock smiled ; a long-wanted red queen had appeared.

"It does make one happy not to think of oneself," she said, "and how the time goes when you are thinking of other people. I am often astounded when Sunday comes round again, for the weeks go by in a flash. I take my dear Edith out for her drives—it is so good to her to have plenty of fresh air—and she comes to lunch with me every day almost, so that she shall not be alone in her house, with her husband away all day, and it is Sunday again, and I get what I call my weekly refresher from our dear Mr. Martin. Such a beautiful sermon he gave us last Sunday—ah, there is the ten I wanted—on the subject of his sad bereavement. His wife, you know. I took her out to Egypt with me; it was most important that she should get out of the winter fogs and damp of England, and she died at Luxor after three days' illness. How glad I was she had a friend with her—my dear, forgive me, how thoughtless I am."

"No, not thoughtless, my dear," said Mrs. Fanshawe. "Not thoughtless. And Mr. Martin. Tell me about Mr. Martin. I feel sure I should like Mr. Martin."

Mrs. Hancock bundled her patience cards together. She had not left a patience unfinished, except when the patience had finished her, for years. Perfectly as she could attend when she was playing it, she prepared now to be absolutely undistracted.

"Indeed, no one could help liking Mr. Martin," she said. "He has the noblest of characters, and with it all not a touch of priggishness. To see him play golf, or to hear him laugh, talk, you would never think he was a clergyman, but

to hear him preach you would think he was a bishop at least. I know of nobody whom I admire more. Listen. Was not that the front-door bell? How tiresome if we are interrupted in our talk. Yes ; I hear Lind going to open it. Now he has shut it again. Ah, it is only a note. Will you excuse me? Yes, from Edward. Just to say he and Edith will come to lunch to-morrow, as he is not going up to the City. No answer, Lind."

Now Mrs. Fanshawe had not failed to mark the expression of her sister-in-law's face when she spoke of Mr. Martin. If she had worn it herself she would have called it a "rapt expression," but it was not so admirable on the features of a woman who, to adopt Mrs. Fanshawe's point of view, was already aground, so to speak, on the shallows of advanced middle-age, where there is not sufficient youth to carry you over those emotional banks. Still, on a younger and perhaps a more spiritual face, it would have been rapt, and it occurred to her that in mind perhaps her sister-in-law was not as old as she looked or as she was. It would be very ridiculous if at that age a woman was the prey of sentimental notions —but then she had a very comfortable house, a delightful retreat from the stuffy little kennel in Oakley Street.

Mrs. Hancock waited till Lind had quite shut the drawing-room door, and then turned to her sister-in-law again.

"My dear, I want your advice," she said, "for you are a woman of the world and I am sure are wise. You see this spring, after poor Mrs. Martin's death, I saw a great deal of the vicar,

and I think I was able to comfort and uphold him, so that he leans a good deal on me now, though of course we have been very great friends for years. Could you give that footstool just a little kick this way? He feels his loneliness very much ; he wants some one whom he knows and trusts and, shall I say, admires? "

"Yes," said Mrs. Fanshawe. "Admires, I am sure."

"How kind of you ! Well, admires, to take the place of her whom he has lost, and who was a very good, sweet sort of woman indeed."

Mrs. Hancock leaned forward.

"He has told all this to me," she said, putting her hand on Mrs. Fanshawe's arm. "Now you know what I think of him. Do advise me—what am I to say to him? Edith and Edward, you see, are both so young. It would be a wonderful thing for them to have a father to go to in those difficulties in which a man is so much more competent to advise them than a woman. Lind and Denton, too, there is a great deal that a master of a house can do to influence men-servants. What shall I say to him? "

Probably no more wholly original reason for matrimony had ever been put forward than that it would provide a man to look after the butler, but one of the stories about the Colonel's early life had shown that he had the highest opinion of his sister's originality. To-day if never before that opinion was justified. Mrs. Fanshawe did not remember the story, nor did the delirious originality strike her now. But she saw quite clearly what Mrs. Hancock, the owner of this comfortable house, wanted her to say. She got up

from her chair and knelt on the footstool which she had kicked a little.

"My dear, I envy you your beautiful, unselfish nature," she said. "And let me be the first to congratulate Mr. Martin."

"You shall be," said Mrs. Hancock, kissing her.

CHAPTER XIV

HEART'S DESIRE

MRS. HANCOCK had made so touching a tale of the help she had been to Mr. Martin, and of Mr. Martin's devotion to her, and how the chief reason for her contemplated marriage was that he might exercise a wise and fatherly care over Edward and Edith and Denton and Lind, that Mrs. Fanshawe lay awake for quite a considerable time that night in spite of the extreme comfort of her bed, vividly exercising her imagination to see how she might paint with an even nobler brush the loves of Henry and Birdie. She flattered herself that she had far more promising material to work with, for what in point of romance was a middle-aged country vicar to compare with the Commander-in-Chief in India, or what was the elderly Mrs. Hancock in comparison with her young and graceful sister-in-law? She was slightly chagrined that Mrs. Hancock had already "bagged" as a motive for matrimony the care of a fatherless daughter, but she had rendered it ridiculous when it was thought over by the addition of a butler and a chauffeur. Besides, Edith was already married, and no longer in the touching desolation of a newly orphaned girl just growing up. However, she found she had many very beautiful things to say, and only hoped that Mrs. Hancock would prove as zealous and absorbed

a listener as she herself had been. She had an opportunity of testing this when they started on their drive next morning. Mrs. Fanshawe was not quite ready when the motor came round, but after a prolonged debate it was decided to go round by the Old Mill just the same, and put off lunch for five minutes. Her unpunctuality, however, was quite forgiven her when she explained that she and Elizabeth had been "so wrapped up" in the tulips that she had no idea how late it was.

Mrs. Fanshawe began preparing for her exquisite revelation without loss of time.

"You've no idea how thrilled I was, dear, by what you told me last night," she said. "I lay awake so long thinking about it. And it is such a treat, oh such a treat to be confided in. I feel we are quite old friends already."

Mrs. Hancock beamed approval.

"We *had* a nice talk," she said, "and I should not wonder if we saw Mr. Martin playing golf. In any case you will see him—oh, what a jolt! That must have been something big on the road. Do you think we might have your window a little more down, dear? I want you to profit by this lovely air. Yes, just like that. I wonder how I shall tell Mrs. Williams and Edith and them all about it. I shall feel so nervous. Perhaps I had better leave it to Mr. Martin. What do you think? Yes, if you look out of this window you will see him there. That is he hitting away with his golf-stick at that furze-bush. How vigorous, is he not? Oh, did you see his ball fly away then? He plays so beautifully! Indeed, dear, I feel such old friends with you, too, and to think that—there, he

is talking to his partner. Now they are quite out of sight."

Mrs. Fanshawe could not at once decline from the high standard of sympathy and comprehension she had set last night.

"And I only just caught a glimpse of him!" she said. "I shall have to curb my impatience till I meet him at your house. But I warn you, my dear, I shall be very critical of the man who is going to take care of you. He will have to think about you much more than you ever think about yourself."

Mrs. Hancock shook her head.

"No, quite the other way round, dear," she said. "I shall have to take care of him. He wears himself out with work. I have no doubt that after his game to-day—he plays golf really entirely for the sake of the influence it gives him over the young men here, and he introduces a spirit of earnestness among the caddies—are they not called, who carry the sticks?—after his game, I dare say he will go straight to his study and finish up his sermon. There is the Great Western Railway. Look! What a long luggage-train! I wonder what it contains. Perhaps the new lawn-tennis net which I ordered from the stores yesterday. I know that when I have charge of Mr. Martin I shall not let him wear himself out so. He ought to have a curate, for instance. I wonder how much a good curate costs."

Mrs. Fanshawe had no data on which to base this calculation, and Mrs. Hancock allowed the conversation to veer a little in her direction.

"You are getting quite a colour in your cheeks, dear, already," she said, "with our good air.

You must come here often and have plenty of it. I can't tell you how often I have meant to ask you here with dear Elizabeth, but I was determined to get everything straight first after my long absence so that you would be quite comfortable. And how often my heart has bled for you in your loneliness! I remember so well after my dear husband died I thought I should never enjoy anything any more. Even now sometimes I should feel dreadfully depressed if I allowed myself to. But I have always told myself what great causes I have for thankfulness. Mr. Martin—— "

Mrs. Fanshawe broke in, feeling that there was a limit at which sympathy passes into drivel and comprehension into idiotic acquiescence. Besides, it was only fair that she should have some sort of an innings.

" I feel so much all that you say, dear," she said, " especially about causes for thankfulness. I am sure they are showered on me. And Bob was always so anxious and thoughtful for my happiness that I should feel that I should be failing in my duty to him if I lost any opportunity of securing it."

This sentence did not seem to come out exactly as she had meant ; it sounded as if the imputation of selfishness might possibly be applied to it, which she did not at all wish to incur. She continued hastily—

" And happiness only lies, as you, dear, show so well, in the making of others happy. I wish I had more people to take care of and think about. At present there has been only Elizabeth who has needed me. I think I may say I have given myself to Elizabeth, for I am sure I have thought

of little else but her and the Memoir since August last. I have brought down the Memoir, as far as I have got. You will like to see it. I might leave it with you when I go away on Monday after my happy visit."

Mrs. Hancock rapidly considered whether she wanted her new friend to stop till Tuesday. She felt she could not make up her mind on the spur of the moment.

"That will be a great treat!" she said. "Or perhaps you would read some of it aloud to me. I am sure you have written it beautifully, and I so much like being read aloud to. The chapter on his early life will bring back old times. Look, there are the towers of Windsor Castle. We can only see them on a very clear day. Mr. Martin has wonderfully long sight."

Mrs. Fanshawe wrenched the conversation back again. She was going to set up another standard for their joint admiration.

"But I want more to look after, more to take care of," she said. "And would you think it very weak of me if I said I wanted also to be a little taken care of myself? I am so inexperienced, and I am afraid Bob spoiled me and made me used to being so lovingly looked after. And there is somebody, dear, who wants, oh so much, to be allowed to look after me."

Mrs. Hancock was just about to remark that the towers of Windsor Castle were no longer visible, but this completely arrested her. She had a momentary sense that Mrs. Fanshawe had taken a mean advantage of her in allowing anything to interfere with the unique interest of her own situation. It came into her mind also that any one

who had married her brother ought not to think of re-marriage for years and years, if ever. But both these impressions were overscored by curiosity. She gave a little excited scream.

"My dear, how you surprise me!" she said. "Yes, pray tell me more. Who is it?"

Mrs. Fanshawe pulled out this ace of trumps.

"Sir Henry Meyrick," she said. "Commander-in-Chief, you know, in India. Such devotion! I am sure that if I had the hardest heart in the world, instead of a very soft one, I should not be able to let such devotion go unrewarded. And Elizabeth—think how he will look after Elizabeth! He is so devoted to her, I declare I should be quite jealous if I did not know that it was just a fatherly affection."

This allusion to the daughter-motif seemed to Mrs. Hancock rank plagiarism, and spoiled in the stealing. Elizabeth was not Mrs. Fanshawe's daughter; she had no right at all to use that as a reason. She made up her mind (if that dim mirror which reflected fleeting emotions can be called a mind) that Mrs. Fanshawe should go away on Monday. Then immediately the mirror reflected another image—it would be rather interesting to speak about "my sister-in-law, Lady Meyrick." To be sure it was a very short time since Colonel Fanshawe's death . . . but then it was a much shorter time since Mrs. Martin's.

Rapidly these evanescent images chased each other over the field. And before the pause grew uncordial she fixed on one of them, namely, "my sister-in-law, Lady Meyrick."

"My dear, I am quite overcome with your news," she said. "It is most interesting, and

I am sure I wish you happiness with all my heart. I have often seen Sir Henry's name in the newspapers and wondered what he was like. And now to think that he is to become so near a relation ! "

By an effort of great magnanimity she decided to pass over the plagiarism altogether.

" And what good fortune for Elizabeth," she said, " whose welfare was always such a source of thought and contriving to me. And what does she think of it all? Why, we are at the Old Mill already ! If you could just reach that speaking-tube, dear, and call to Denton to stop, so that we may enjoy looking at it. Mr. Martin always calls it the most picturesque corner in Middlesex. How swiftly the water runs, does it not? Of course, you will not think of being married for a long time to come. Is it not a coincidence that our dear Bob should have married twice, and now you are going to do the same, and Mr. Martin, too, and me? I declare I never heard of such coincidences ! You must be sure and tell Sir Henry to come down to see me. Mr. Martin and he must make friends. And who knows that I shall not flap my wings a little further yet and come out to see you in India? Where does the Commander-in-Chief live? Look, there is the miller fishing ! I wonder if he has caught anything. I am afraid we must turn, or we shall be late for lunch, which would never do, as we have postponed it in order to be in time. And I hope you won't dream of going away on Monday. You must stop till Tuesday at the very least."

Mrs. Fanshawe was not perfectly satisfied, though she felt she was being envied. She determined not to be so easy of access.

"You must get Henry's leave for that," she said, "for I promised him I would be back on Monday. I don't know what he would do if I broke my promise to him. And such a business as I had to allow him to let me go away at all."

For the first time for many years Mrs. Hancock found herself in the position of one who asked instead of granted favours.

"Ah! I wonder if you could induce him to come down here on Monday to take you back the next day or the day after?" she said.

Mrs. Fanshawe greedily pursued her advantage and assumed an air of odious superiority.

"But, dear, we should be taxing the capabilities of your charming little house too much," she said, feeling certain of her ground. "I should not wonder if Henry was unable to go anywhere without his secretary, as well as a servant. He must have to keep in constant touch with the India Office. But it is delightful of you to suggest it, only we must not trespass on your good-nature."

"No difficulty at all!" cried Mrs. Hancock. "There is the pink room and the best blue bedroom and the lilac dressing-room next mine, into which Elizabeth can go. The thing is done, dear, if you will only say the word. And if Sir Henry plays golf, there will be Mr. Martin delighted to lend him some golf-sticks and go round with him, do they not call it? It will be a pleasure to him; he has always had such an admiration for soldiers, for, to be sure, as he says sometimes, he is a soldier himself, fighting battles continually. I will get up a little dinner-party for Monday night, and Edward and Elizabeth shall play afterwards, if Sir Henry likes music."

While this kittenish comedy was going on something younger and more tragical was in progress in the two adjacent houses. Edward had been sitting in his smoking-room after breakfast, with eyes that wandered over his uncomprehended newspaper, conscious of an overmastering desire to slip across to the house next door merely to see Elizabeth, to satisfy the eyes that ached for her and, as he knew well, but to render the more acute the aching of his heart. His wife, as was often her custom, had come in after she had attended to her household duties, and sat in her usual seat by the window, speaking occasionally to him, or replying, in perfectly commonplace fashion, to his dropped observations. They had spoken of their plans for the day, of the arrival of Mrs. Fanshawe and Elizabeth, and now and then, focusing his eyes but not his mind, he had mentioned some newspaper topic. Such half-hours they had spent a hundred times before, but to-day each was intensely conscious of something that, always lying behind their intercourse and never spoken of between them, had suddenly enveloped and enshadowed, like the gathering of a tropical storm, the foreground of their life as well. He tried to imagine himself putting down his newspaper in a leisurely way, and forming his voice to say, lightly and casually, that he would stroll across to Mrs. Hancock's. But he felt that, as if intoxicated, his tongue would stammer and stumble on the words. Once he laid his paper down, and saw that on the instant she had started into attentive expectation, had fixed her eyes on him ready for what she knew would come from his lips, for she read, so he felt, his unspoken

sentence, knowing what filled his mind. But still he sat there, unable to tell her what he ached to do, while she waited. In all the months of their marriage Elizabeth's name had been mentioned only as the name of some indifferent cousin might have been ; never as one who held Edward's heart in the hollow of her hands.

For herself, even as bees build up in walls of impenetrable gluelike wax some intruder and enemy to their hive, Edith had walled away from her life all thought of her cousin. She had built her up into a separate chamber of her brain, so that her worker-bees, the conscious denizens of her mind, should have no access to her. Her love for Edward (that nipped and unexpanded bud, which had never blown), which had claimed possession of him, instead of giving him his liberty and seeking his happiness at the cost of the last drop of her heart's blood, had starved on its comfortless food, and the leanness of her desire had entered into her soul. For seven months she had been his wife, sharer in name in all that nominally was his, recipient of his unwearied kindness and affection, but never for a single moment possessing his essential self. She had no word or thought of complaint of him in his conduct or in his feelings towards her ; he gave all that was his to give. She had demanded of him the fulfilment of his bargain, and to the full extent of his solvency, so to speak, he had paid it. But now she knew that he was absolutely insolvent towards her with regard to the coinage of the only true mint. She had thought that her love with its hopeless limitations could make his reef of gold hers. She had thought that they could settle

down into a sham that would cheat both himself and her, that the mask on his face would either be withdrawn or would deceive her into the belief of its reality. Neither had happened ; he must always wear a mask for her, and that mask would never grow so like the human face below it (so little way below, and yet withdrawn into impenetrable depths) that it would deceive her into believing in it. And now, before long, she would bear a child to him, and it seemed to her, in the enlightenment that these smooth, prosperous months of misery had brought her, that her baby would be no better than a bastard.

It must not be supposed that this misery was acute or the degree of enlightenment it brought clear and cloudless. Her perceptions were not of the kind that admit great poignancy either of wretchedness or of bliss. Once only perhaps in all her life had the engines of her being worked up to their full power, and that was when she claimed the fulfilment of Edward's promise. She had felt intensely and acutely then the impossibility of giving him up, but since that flash of deplorable intensity she had fallen back on to her normal levels, where the ground, so to speak, was solid and rather clayey, where there were neither peaks nor precipices. But it declined slowly and unintermittently into a place of featureless gloom. Yet, except to any one who was gifted with the divine intuition of love towards her, there were no signs in her normal behaviour of this inward wretchedness, and for poor Edith there was nobody thus inspired. She had always been rather reserved and silent, and even Mr. Martin, that brilliant seeker after the joys and

sorrows of others, had neither missed in her the steady placidity that he knew nor had detected any other change. As for her mother, Edith's invariable punctuality, her quiet recognition of objects of interest like the towers of Windsor Castle and the trains on the Great Western Railway, were sufficient evidence of contentment, especially since Edward always got home by the dinner train and she was going to have a baby. Here were adequate causes for thankfulness, and she was sure that Edith, who had so strong a sense of duty, appreciated them.

Edith's enlightenment was of the same order, no noonday blaze, but only a diffused luminance that came veiled through those clouds, not dispersing them. But she no longer groped in darkness as she had done when she decided that she could not voluntarily give Edward his liberty. She could see more now. Not only could she see the utter unreality at which she had grasped, but that there was in existence a real light different altogether from the phantasmal will-o'-the-wisp which she had blindly followed into the quagmire. She had sought her own, thinking that it was love she followed. She would have sought her own no longer, if it had been possible for her to make choice again.

Vaguely, as she sat this morning by the window, these things passed before her mind, as the pictures of some well-known and familiar book pass before the eye of one who listlessly turns the leaves. At the end of the book, she knew, there were pictures she had not seen yet. It was as if Edward's finger as well as hers was on the page, doubting whether to turn on or not. Nearly an hour

wore away thus, outwardly like many other hours, but in reality an hour of poise and expectancy. Then on the road outside the gate she saw pass, as she had so often seen, her mother's motor. Mrs. Fanshawe was with her, and next door Elizabeth was alone.

"Mother going out for her drive," she said mechanically.

She did not look round, but heard the paper flutter in Edward's fingers.

"Alone?" he asked. "Or with whom?"

"With Mrs. Fanshawe," said she. And again the silence fell.

Suddenly a desire and a doubt came to her. She did not know how they came, for the impulse that prompted them seemed to have taken no part in her thoughts. Apparently something behind that wall of gluelike wax had stirred—stirred imperatively, giving her quickness and decision. She rose.

"I shall go across and see Elizabeth," she said. "I know you have been wanting to do that all morning, Edward. But you couldn't say it. I understood."

He got up also.

"What do you mean?" he said. "What are you saying?"

"Something perfectly simple. Of course you want to see Elizabeth, and of course you find a difficulty in telling me so. Do you know that we haven't mentioned Elizabeth's name, except as a stranger might mention it, ever since our marriage, ever since the night, in fact, that—that I settled to marry you."

"No; and that was natural, wasn't it?"

Certainly something stirred behind the sealed-up partition. The bees themselves, the thoughts and workers in Edith's mind, were tearing the partition away.

"I suppose it was," she said. "But I want to see Elizabeth now. That is natural, too, because I was always fond of Elizabeth, and I don't blame her because you loved her. You see, she never loved you; she told me that herself."

He came close to her.

"Why do you speak of Elizabeth now," he said, "after all these months of silence?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. Why does one do anything? It occurred to me, I suppose, to speak of Elizabeth because she is here, and because I was going across to see her. She never loved you, Edward."

"No. You told me that."

He spoke quietly and reassuringly, but it occurred to him that for some reason Edith was beginning to doubt that, for she looked at him, so it seemed, with a certain question and challenge in her eye. It was as if she weighed his answer, or took it, like a doubtful coin, and rang it to test its genuineness.

"I shall go now," she said, still lingering. "Or do you not wish me to go?"

She paused a moment.

"Why do you not wish me to go, Edward?" she said.

"I want you to do just as you wish, dear," he said.

For the moment a certain cloud of trouble and restlessness, quite alien to her normal reasoning, had seemed to disturb her. But it cleared, and she spoke naturally again.

"We lunch there, do we not?" she said. "I dare say I shall not come again before that. Till lunch-time, then."

She traversed the hall, hesitated as to whether she should take a hat, decided against it, and went out into the cool spring sunshine. The gate of communication between the two gardens (Mrs. Hancock had eventually decided that since Edith and Edward used it so much more than she did it was only reasonable that he should pay for half of it) had been made, and she went through it, leaving it aswing, with a tinkling latch. As she had said to Edward, she scarcely knew why the idea of Elizabeth and the desire to see her had taken hold of her mind. All these months she had deliberately and of set purpose put the idea of Elizabeth from her, consciously segregating it, refusing it admittance into the current of her thoughts. That had been natural enough, for it was on the elimination of Elizabeth from their joint lives that the success of their marriage, she had seen, must depend. And to-day she had registered, had contemplated and admitted the fact of its failure. Elizabeth had not been eliminated from their lives ; when just now Edith had alluded, casually almost, to the fact of Edward's being in love with her, saying she did not blame Elizabeth for that, he had let that pass without challenge. It had not occurred to him, however lamely, to take exception to it. That had shown with a convincingness that she had not known before how her cousin was knitted into Edward's heart. It would have to be cut to bits before she could be disentangled from it.

Quietly, insensibly, throughout those months that

conviction had been growing on her. It had been like some bulb buried in the earth ; she had known in her inner consciousness, though there was no outward evidence of the fact, that it was growing. To-day the green, vigorous horn of its sprouting showed above the ground. It was not a shock to her any more than is a letter that confirms the bad news conveyed in a telegram. But its authenticity now was quite beyond dispute. In those seven months of their marriage Elizabeth's spell had lost none of its potency, and Edith stood between them just as she had done on the day when she had decided she could not give him up, holding them apart.

To-day, too, a definite doubt had come into her mind, and she knew that her desire to see Elizabeth was connected with its possible resolution. Months ago Elizabeth had told her that no idea of love for Edward had ever been hers ; that she had never thought of him in such a light. To-day, for no definite reason, but by process probably of the general enlightenment that her misery had brought her, she wondered if that was true. At first when Elizabeth had told her that, she had implicitly believed it. Now she wondered whether Elizabeth had not said that for her sake ; whether, seeing that she herself was determined not to give Edward up, Elizabeth had not splendidly lied. Certainly that statement, true or not, had had the effect of making Edith quite comfortable, as her mother would say. A dozen and a hundred dozen times she had told herself, relying on that, that Edward would have been no nearer his happiness if she had given him up. But Edith did not so far deceive herself as to say that it would have made

any difference to her decision, even if Elizabeth had loved him. She knew herself but poorly, but she knew herself sufficiently well to be aware that nothing in the world just then would have induced her voluntarily to give him his freedom. It had been open to him to break his word, and not marry her, but it had not seemed morally possible for her to let him go.

Elizabeth was just coming out of the long window of the drawing-room when Edith passed through the gate, and the two cousins met on the croquet-lawn. These warm days of May had made it possible to play already, and Edward, at his wife's wish, had had several games in preparation for the Heathmoor Tournament. Ellis this morning had moved several seats out of the summer-house on to the grass, and the "Croquet set No. 1, complete in tin-lined box" (the most expensive set of all that could be bought at the stores), which had been Mrs. Hancock's wedding-present to Edward, stood open in case anybody wished to play. Just a year ago, as it now occurred to Edith, she had sat here when Elizabeth on the morning after her arrival from India had come out. She remembered how almost on the first mention of Edward's name Elizabeth had guessed their engagement.

Edith greeted her with her usual precise and restrained manner.

"I heard you and Mrs. Fanshawe arrived yesterday," she said. "Mother was looking forward to your coming."

Elizabeth kissed her.

"I was glad to come," she said. "I was beginning to be afraid I should never see Heathmoor again."

Edith looked at her a moment in silence.

"Did you want to?" she asked.

"Yes. I wanted to see you, too, Edith. I—I hope you are happy."

Edith laughed a wretched little jangle of a laugh.

"I am very comfortable, mother will tell you," she said. "Edward is always very kind to me. He has made a great deal of money this year. He comes back from town every evening by the dinner train. And I am going to have a baby."

The semblance of ordinary conversation had to be kept up as long as Edith chose. If the talk was going to get more intimate, the deepening of it had to come from her. Quite suddenly it came.

"I am very unhappy, Elizabeth," she said. "I have not had a single happy moment since I married. It has all turned out different to what I expected. I wanted Edward so much that I could not give him up, and I thought that by degrees he would turn to me, and—and love me. He never loved me. He proposed to me and I accepted him because we both thought that we should be very comfortable together. So we should have been if he had not—had not fallen in love with you."

Elizabeth laid her hand on Edith's knee.

"My dear, is there any need to speak of that?" she said.

Edith turned quickly on her. All her secret self, suppressed through those months which by rights should have been months of such wonderful and magical expansion, fell on her, struggling to be allowed utterance. When she came here, with no more than her vague desire to see Elizabeth,

she had not guessed how like highwaymen with cudgels and bludgeons her secret walled-up life would attack her, fighting to express itself.

"I think there is need to speak of it," she said, "and I have no one whom I can speak to but you. If I told mother, she would—she would recommend me to see Mr. Martin; if I told Edward, he would only try to be kinder to me. Elizabeth, his kindness chokes me. I can't breathe in it. It has all been an utter, utter failure. I thought that he would get to love me, so that it would be enough for me to be with him always; I thought I should be satisfied to be his wife. I thought, too, that he would be happy as well as I, for I was not, so I thought then, entirely selfish. I should not have refused to give him up, if I had thought that it would turn out so hopelessly. Then there was this as well; you did not love him, and so I was not standing in the way of his happiness."

Elizabeth felt her face go suddenly white. Had she, too, made an awful, a lifelong, mistake? She knew the integrity of her purpose, when she had told Edith she did not love him, how she had said that simply and solely for Edith's sake, so that having definitely and irrevocably chosen not to give Edward up she might not be the prey of back-thoughts and gnawings. But what if all this misery, all this hunger, this unslaked thirst could have been avoided? What if she had rejected her great renunciation, had avowed her love for Edward, had given rein to the steeds of desire? Had her renunciation been no more than some savage heathen rite, some mutilation of herself and him? For a moment the very foundations of her

world seemed to sway, and all its noble superstructure to totter. But Edith did not notice the blanching of her face, nor saw her quivering eyelids. She was looking fixedly at the spot in the lawn in front of her with an intent and absent air, and went on speaking in the same unemotional voice.

"I may as well be honest," she said, "because there does not seem to be much else left. As a matter of fact, I should not have done differently even if you had loved him. I did not care two straws for your happiness, nor for his, but only for my own. And yet I did love him; I was passionately fond of him. I thought I could make him love me, or at any rate that he would forget you. I told myself anyhow that it was but a sudden wild fancy he had for you, that he had fallen in love with your music. I did not care what I told myself, so long as I got him. And now at this present moment, I would give anything in the world if it could be made possible that I should still love him. I don't love him any more. I am not even jealous that he loves you. He may do as he likes, if only he could cease being kind to me. If only I could go right out of his life, and never see him again. But that's impossible. Soon I shall be the mother of his child. And, besides, mother would think it so odd. So would Mr. Martin. They would call me wicked, but I think it is really much wickeder to go on living with him. Yes, all the time that I was trying to get his love I was only poisoning my own. I was poisoning that which was dearer to me than anything in the world. I am sorry for it now. It lies before me quite dead, killed by me. Well, I can say truthfully that I am sorry. When

you have committed a crime like that, the only possible palliation is that you are sorry. But I did love him ; even when I gave my love that first dose of poison in refusing to let him go, I loved him.

She got up in agitation.

" Let no one say I did not love him ! " she cried in a voice suddenly strained and shrill.

Elizabeth got up also, forcing down her terror at this tragic figure suddenly revealed to her, and full of growing pity.

" Edith, dear, you are talking wildly," she said. " You don't know what you are saying."

Edith put up both hands to her head.

" It is not wild talk," she said, " it is sober truth. But I express it badly ; I get confused. And there was something I wanted to ask you. Was it really true what you told me? "

Then her face changed. The hardness and restraint faded from it ; it became humanized again by suffering.

" Elizabeth, I feel so ill," she said. " I am in pain, in great pain ! "

Elizabeth was sitting in the window of Edward's smoking-room where two mornings ago he and Edith had sat talking and reading before she came over to the house next door. Late that night her baby, a seven-months child, had been born, flickering faintly into life and out again, and now in the room overhead Edith lay dying. An hour ago she had asked to see Elizabeth, but had passed into a state of unconsciousness before the girl could come to her. So now Elizabeth waited near at hand in case her cousin rallied again and again wished

to see her. Edward, in the room upstairs, had promised to call her at once ; Mrs. Hancock watched with him.

The house was very still with that curious stillness that comes with such a waiting. Outside the warm May wind blew in at the window laden with the scent of the wallflowers that grew just outside, and the air was full of the fragrance and chirrupings of spring. At the gate stood Mrs. Hancock's motor, which had just brought down a doctor from London, who at this moment was holding a consultation with Edith's doctor in the dining-room. Elizabeth had propped open the door of the room where she sat, so that she might hear him come out, and get a word with him, but she had been told there was no hope that her cousin would live. Above her head, from the room where Edith lay, came an occasional footstep, sounding dim and muffled, and she could hear the slow tick of the clock in the hall outside. She guessed, she believed with certainty, what it was Edith wanted to say to her, namely, to repeat the question that had been cut short by the coming of her pains two days before. And Elizabeth knew how she would answer it.

She sat there long in silence, alert for any noise that should come from the house. Then the dining-room door, where the physicians were consulting, opened, and she went out to meet them in the hall. A couple of sentences told her all, and the London specialist walked out to the motor waiting for him, while the other went upstairs again to the silent room. From outside came the whirr of the engines as Denton started them again.

Elizabeth sat down on the bottom step of the

stairs, her mind quite still and inactive. Occasionally, like a cloud taking substance suddenly in a serene sky, some remembered scene, some sentence, some trivial happening connected with Edith, appeared there, forming itself and vanishing again, and more than once Edith's voice sounded in her ears as she said, "Let no one say that I did not love him." But for the most part the imminence of the great silent event that they were all waiting for kept her mind vacant. In that presence she could not think of anything else; those little things that kept occurring to her seemed to come from outside.

Then she heard a stir above her, the click of an opened door, and, looking round and up, she saw Edward beckoning to her.

"She has asked for you," he said, as she entered.

Edith was lying on her bed, looking with wide-open eyes at the ceiling. She did not seem to notice Elizabeth's entrance, but the doctor beckoned to her, and she knelt down at the right of the bed. Then he went back and stood some little distance off by the window. The breeze streamed in through the open sash, making the blind tassel rattle and tap against the wall, but otherwise there was dead silence.

Then suddenly Edith spoke.

"I want to see Elizabeth," she said. "Will not Elizabeth come?"

Elizabeth got up.

"I am here, Edith," she said.

"I want to speak to you alone," she said. "Nobody else must hear."

She had turned her eyes to the girl as she bent

over her, and waited, looking at her with a fixed, anxious expression, till the others had gone into the dressing-room adjoining.

"We are alone?" she asked. "Then tell me. Did you love him?"

Elizabeth bent lower over her and kissed her.

"Yes, dear Edith," she said. "I always loved him."

"Then—then you must get him to forgive me. Perhaps he will forgive me? Do you think he will?"

Elizabeth took hold of the white, wet hand that lay outside the coverlet.

"Oh, my dear!" she said.

"Ask him to come, then," said Edith faintly. "Quickly, quickly!"

Next moment they stood together by the bed. Her lips moved once, but no sound came from them. Only her eyes, over which lay the deepening shadow, looked from one to the other and back again.

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